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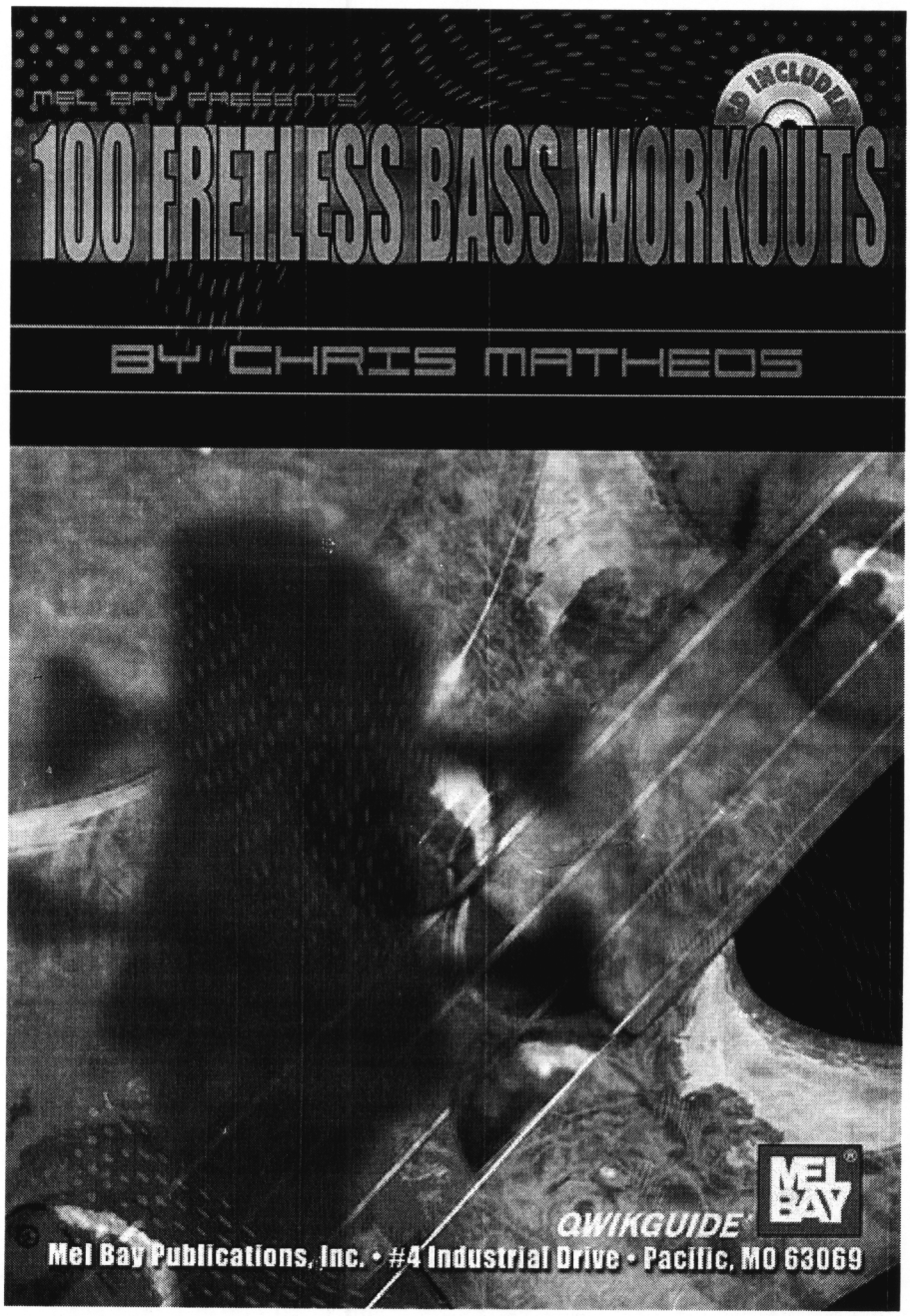
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MEL BAY PRESENTS

100 FRETLESS BASS WORKOUTS

BY CHRIS MATHEOS

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FOREW0RD

The majority of students who want to learn fretless bass usually have spent some time playing fretted bass. These students often quickly learn that playing fretless bass is much different than playing fretted bass. There are many similarities and differences between the two instruments. On fretless bass the right hand technique is identical to fretted bass. The note locations are also identical on both. The left hand is where some of the differences lie. The lack of frets can be an entirely new world for a student who first learned fretted bass. The simplest exercises on fretted bass can become very difficult exercises on fretless. The fretless bass was originally developed to create the tone of an upright bass in a portable instrument. It was also made so the bassist could play with an upright bass tone loud. In the early days of bass the electronic technology was nothing like the current day.

Becoming a quality fretless bassist often takes a mental adjustment. Learning to think with an upright bass approach often helps students. There are many exercises in this book that regularly use open strings. On fretted bass many of these exercises generally would not use open strings. These exercises are very similar to upright bass exercises. This use of open strings is a great way to check your intonation. Proper intonation is one of the most important elements in fretless bass playing.

Another difference between fretless and fretted bass playing is in vibrato. Vibrato is often achieved on fretted bass buy bending a note. Bending notes does not work well without frets. On fretless bass vibrato is usually achieved with the left hand fingertips. When you are holding a note down try slowly rocking your finger back and forth from side to side. Do this well letting the note sustain. This technique can even cause tonal variations when mastered.

OPEN STRING EXERCISES:

The following exercises mix open strings with fingered notes. The open strings can be used as a way to check your intonation. If your intonation is off the fingered notes will sound out of tune with the open strings. If your intonation is correct the examples will sound in tune.

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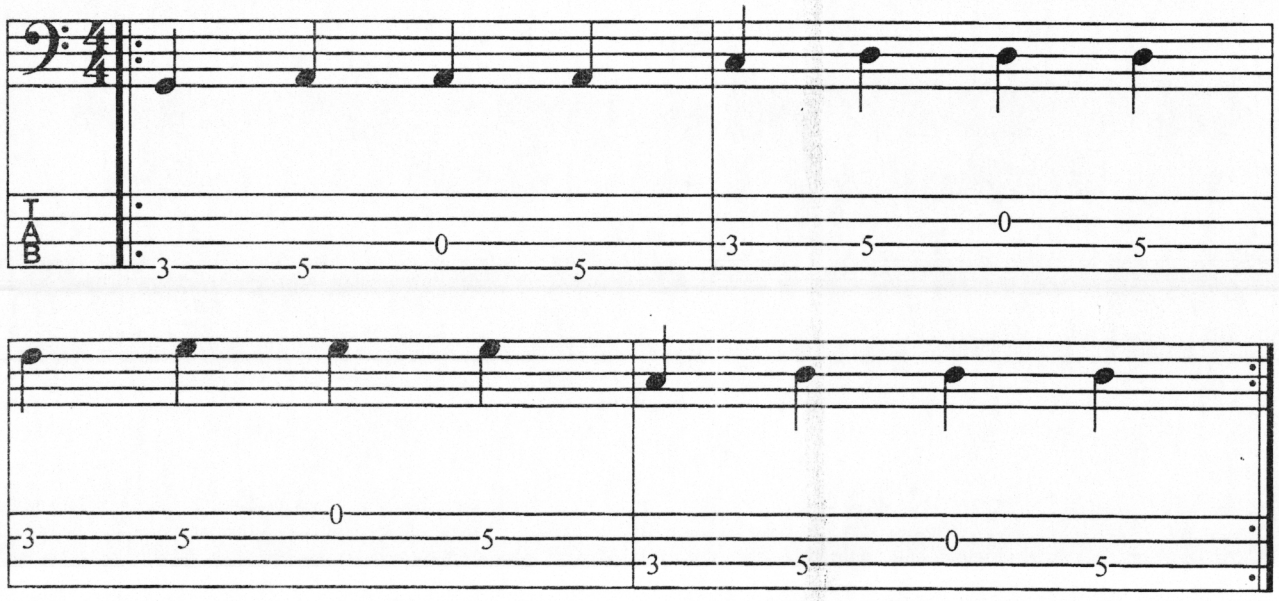

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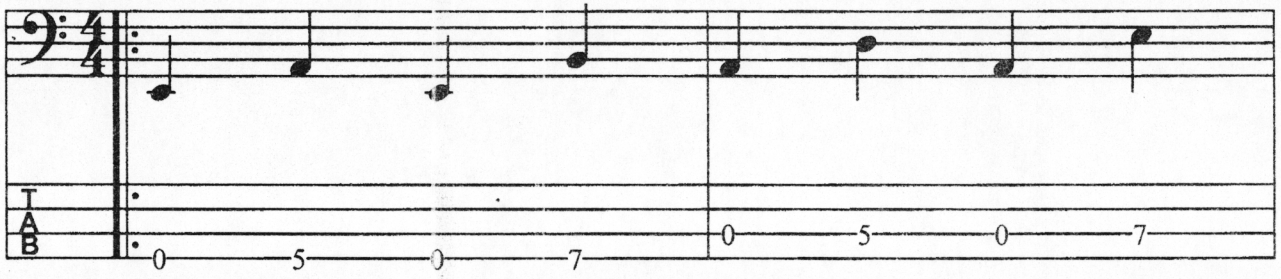

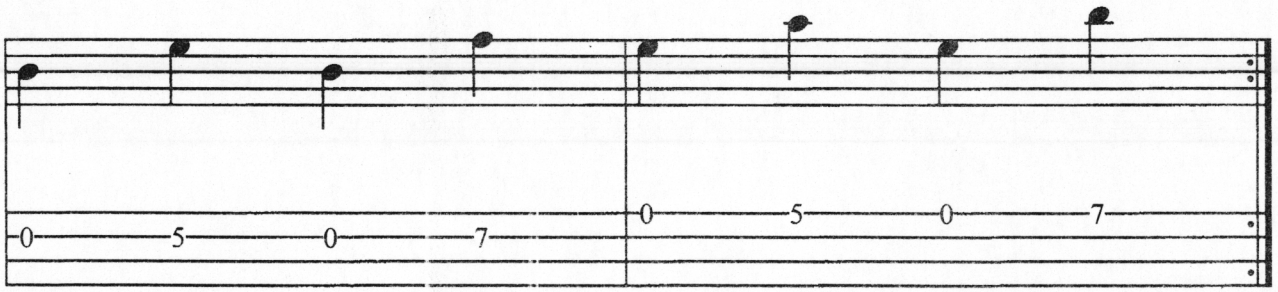

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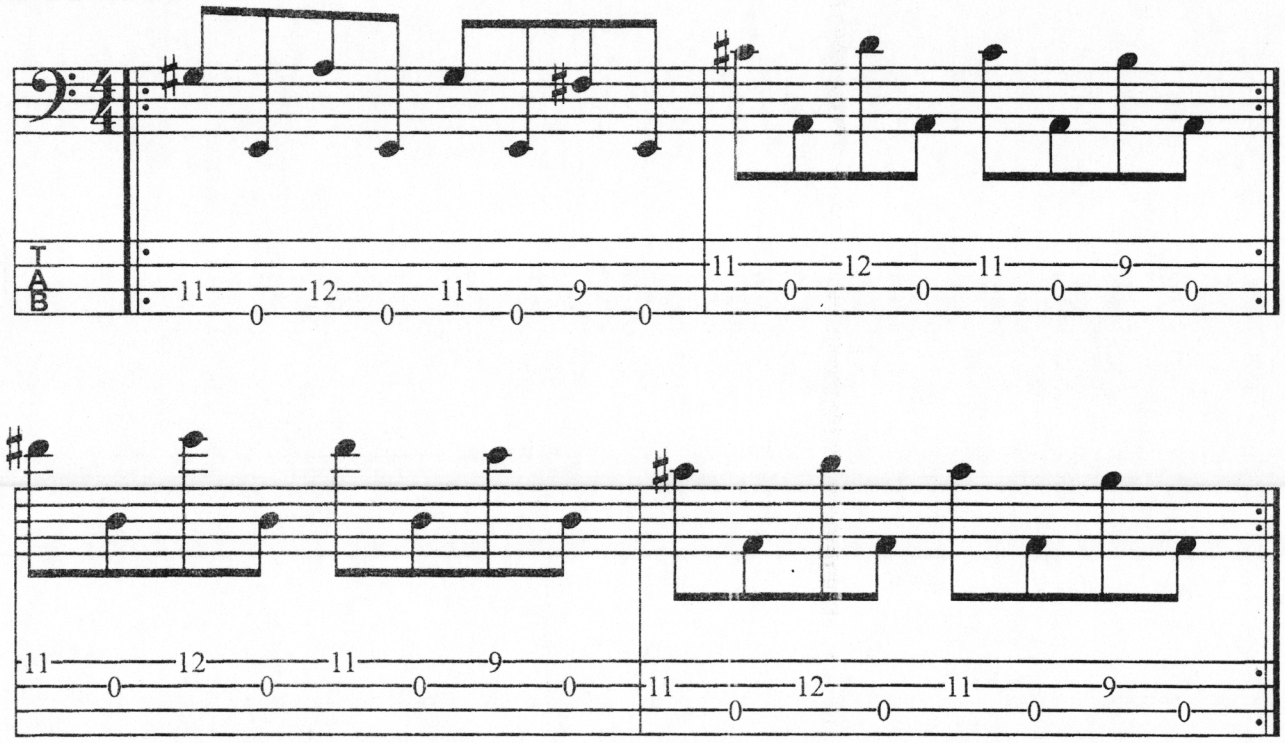

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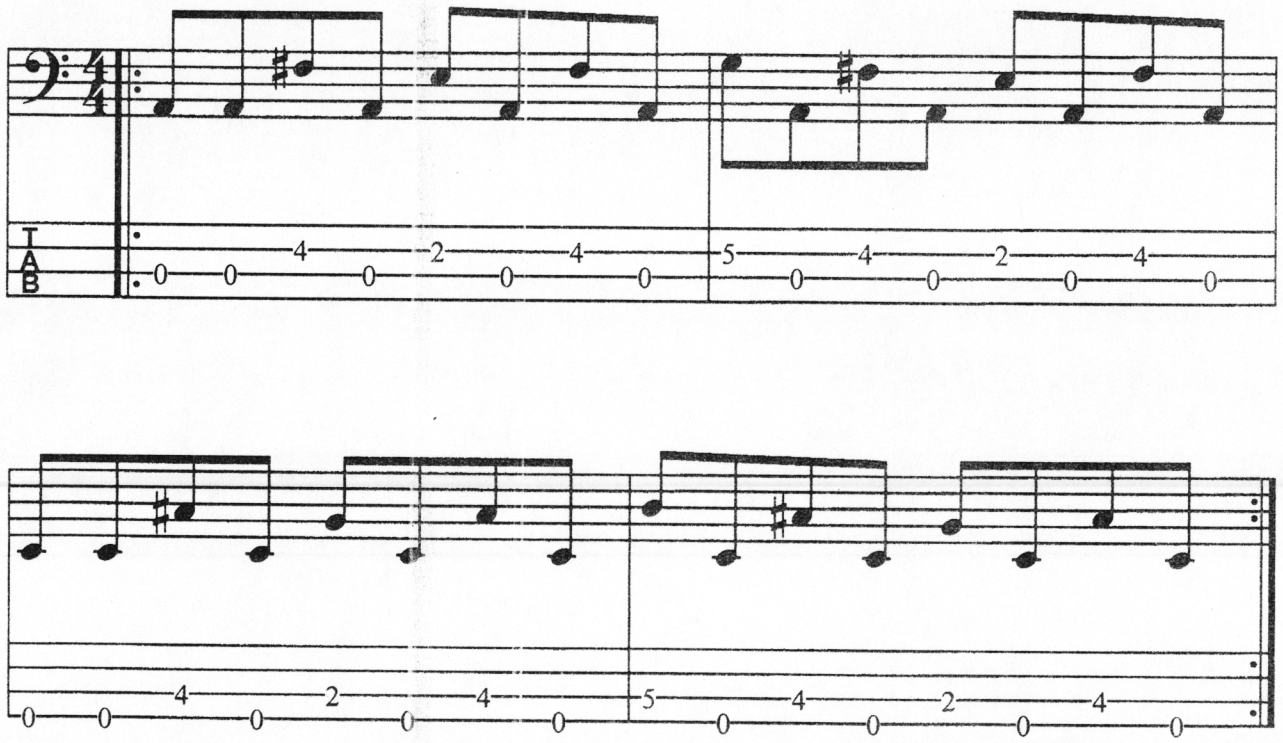

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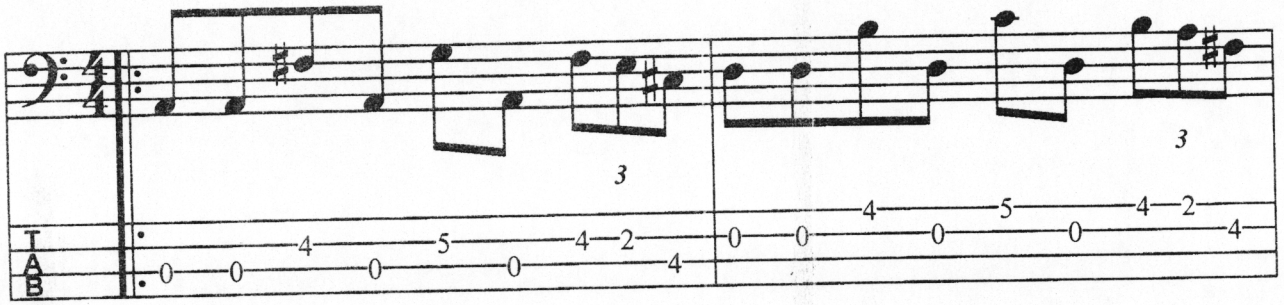

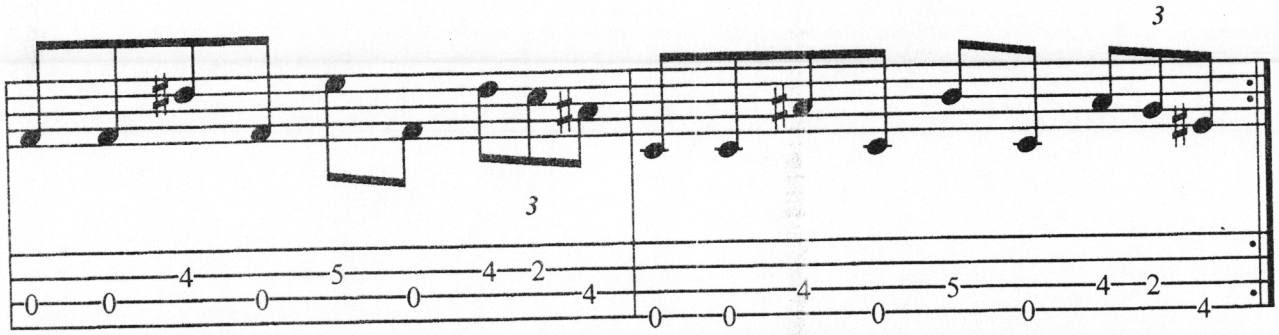

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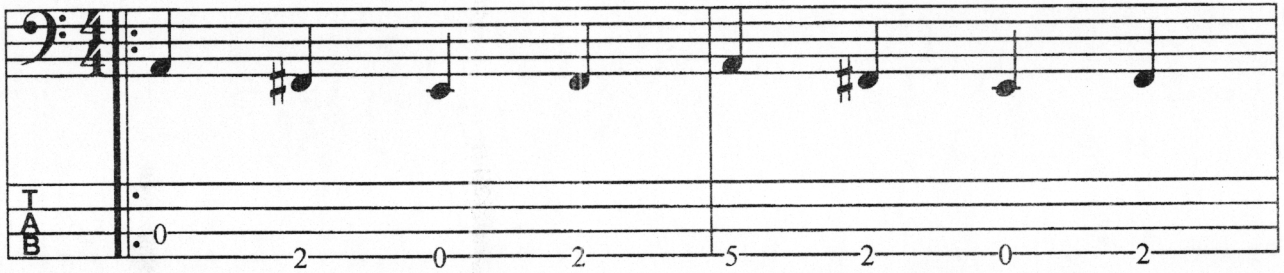

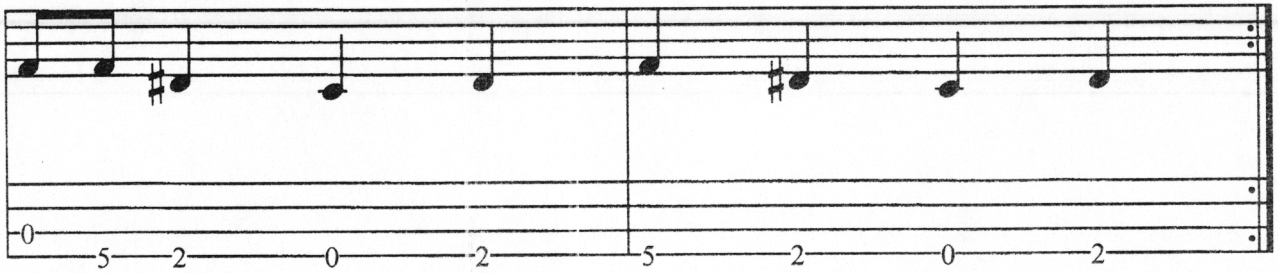

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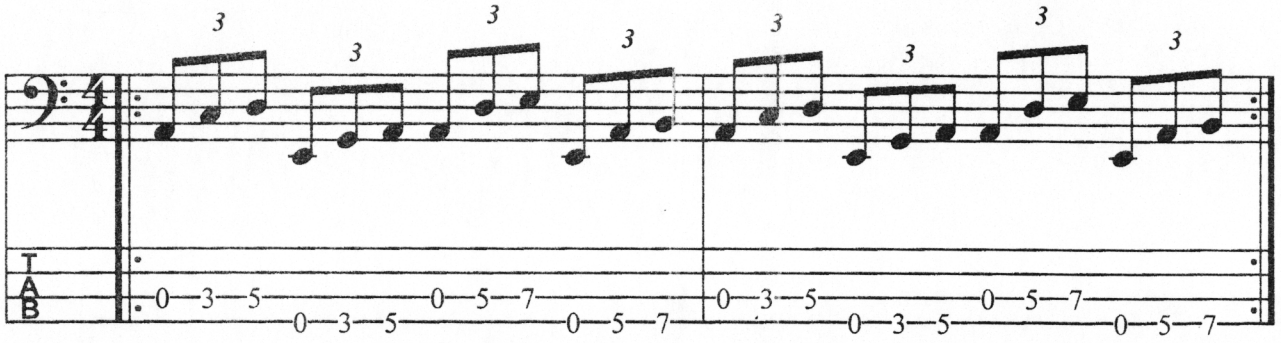

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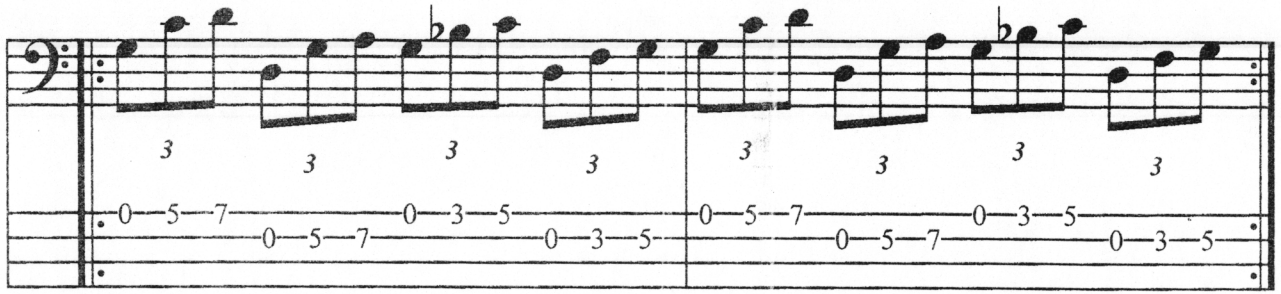
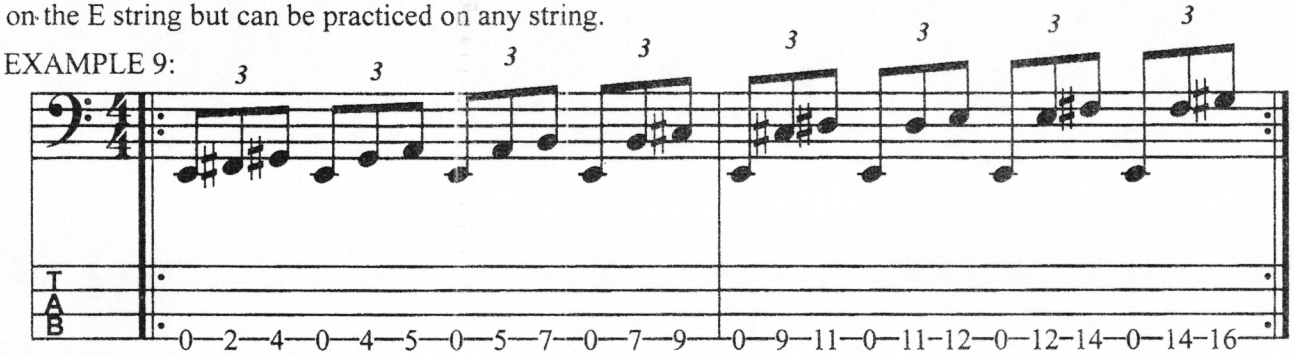


SCALE EXERCISES

The following two examples work with a major scale. The scale is layed out on one string instead of in a single position. Playing these examples requires regular shifting of the left hand. The examples are written on the E string but can be practiced on any string.

EXAMPLE 9:



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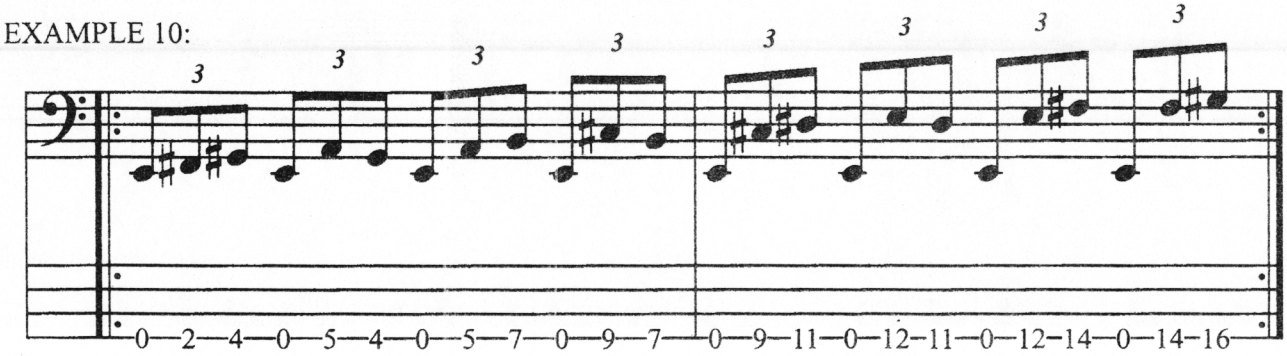

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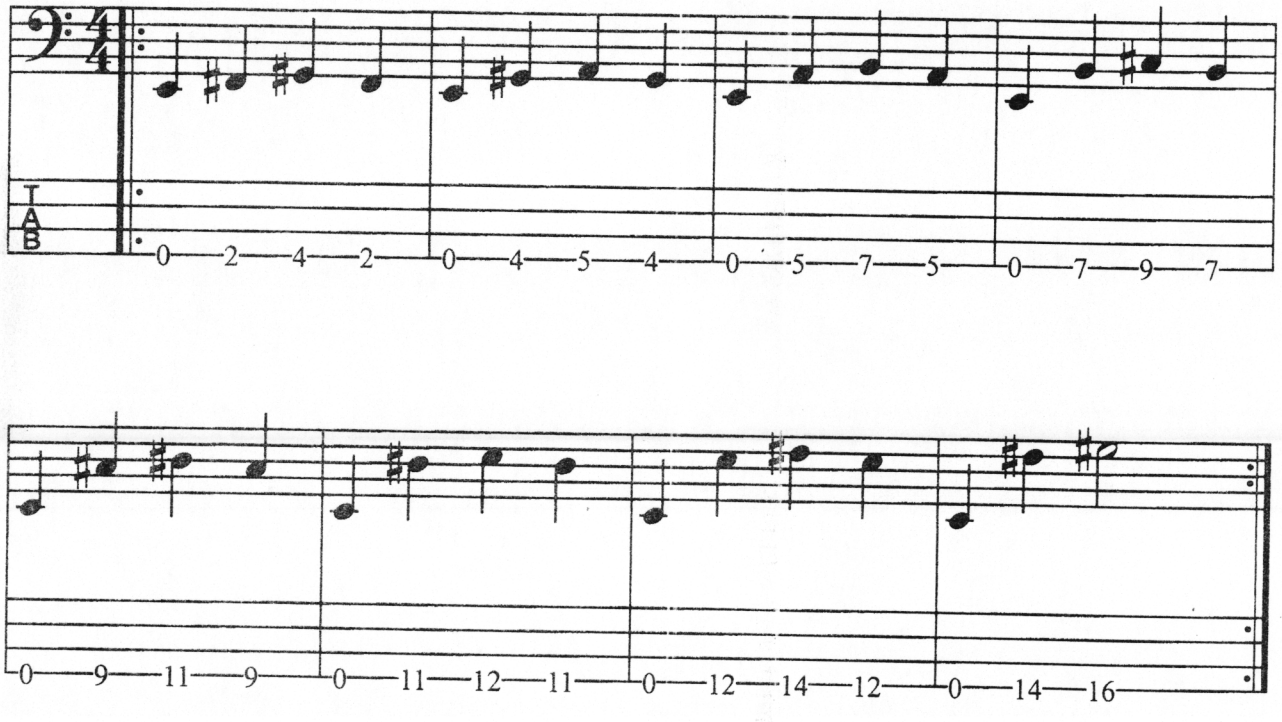
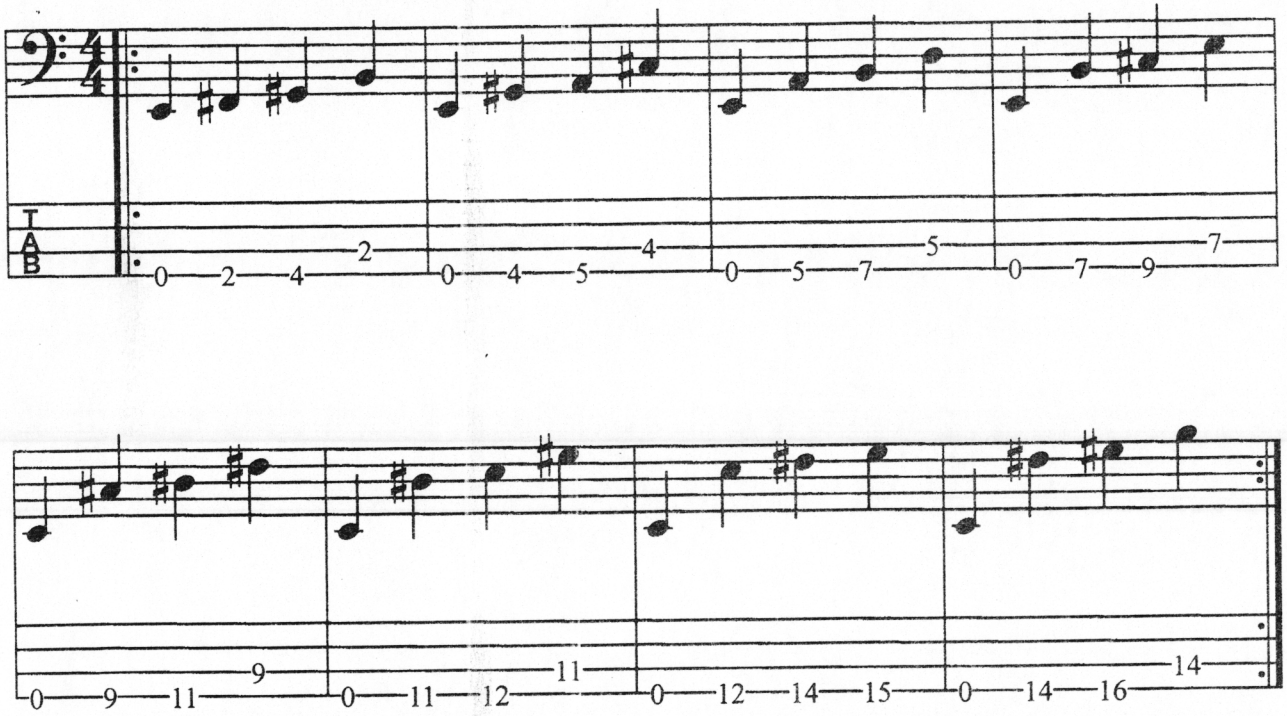
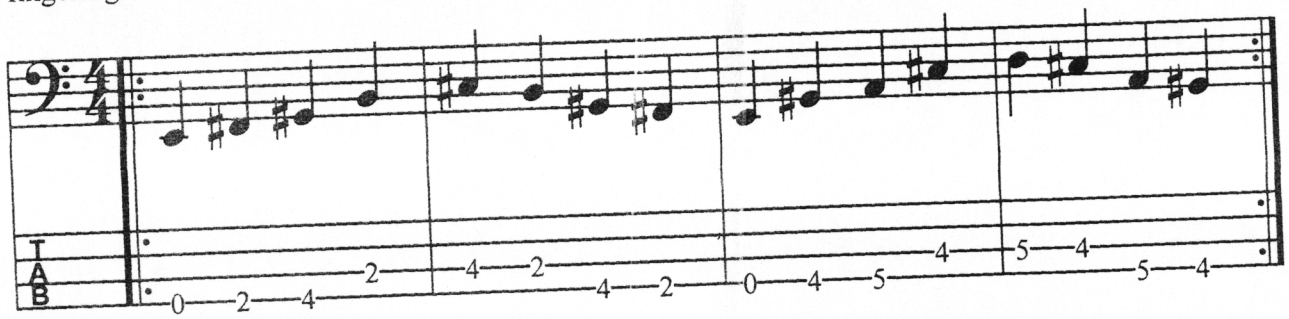


EXAMPLE 12: The following example stretches a major scale over two strings.



EXAMPLE 13: The following examples stretch a major scale over two strings. Try practicing the fingerings in these examples over other strings. (like your D and G strings).



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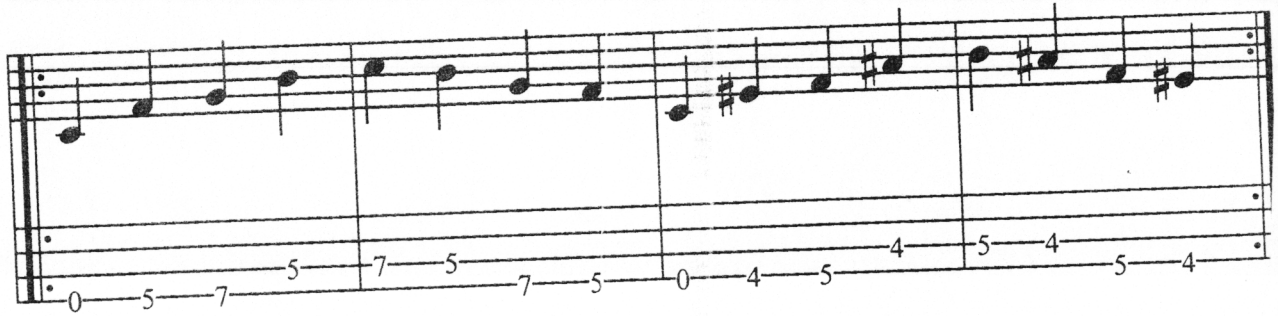

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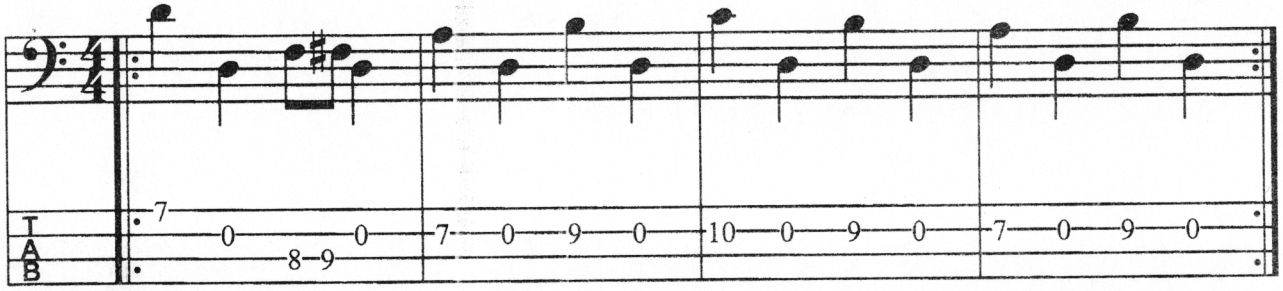

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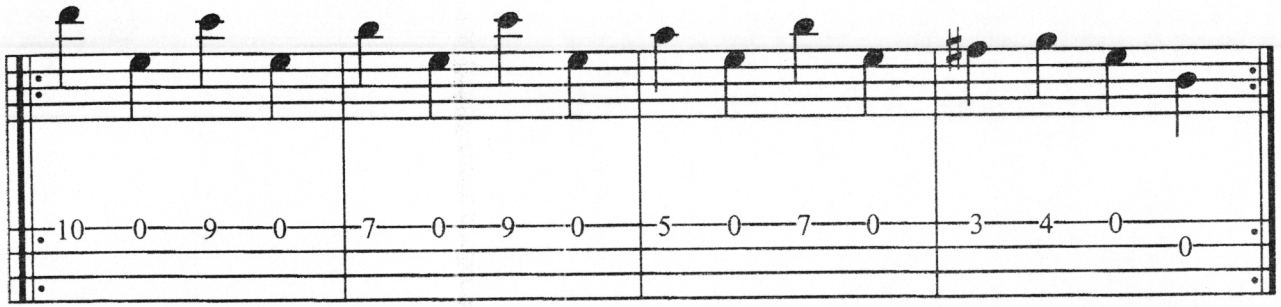

SLIDES

Slides are one of the most commonly used techniques on fretless bass. They can be used in bass lines to create color and personality. The following examples focus on the use of slides.

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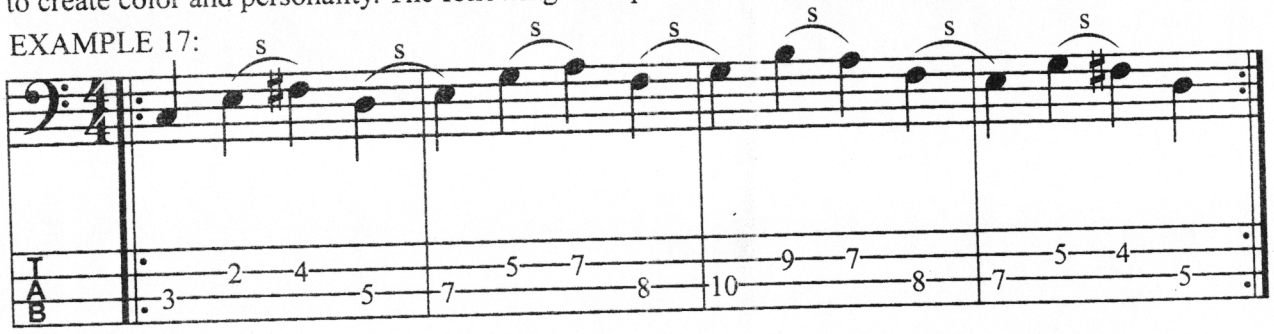

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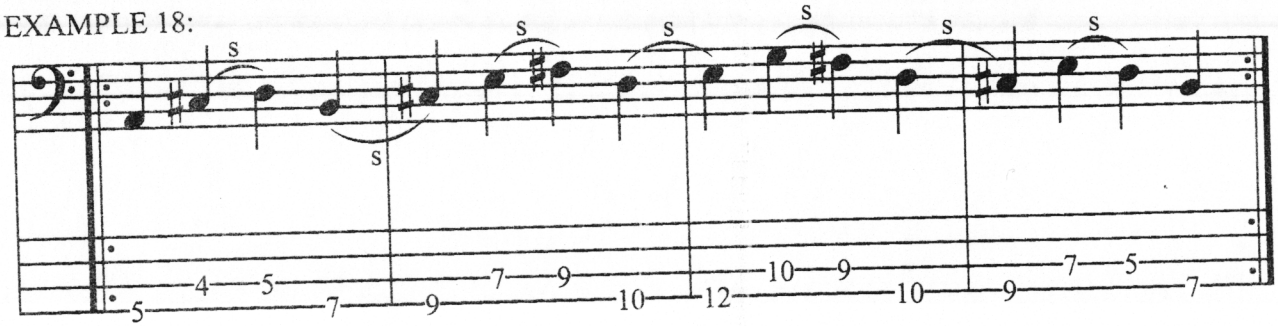

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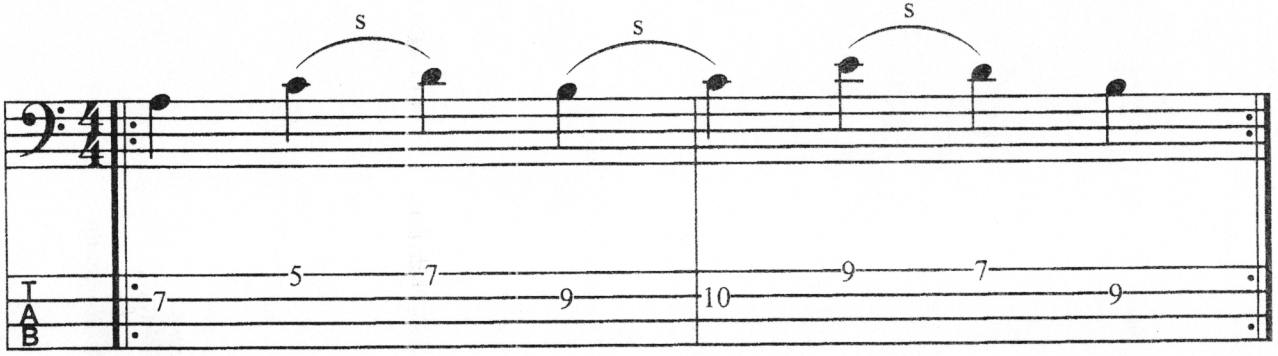

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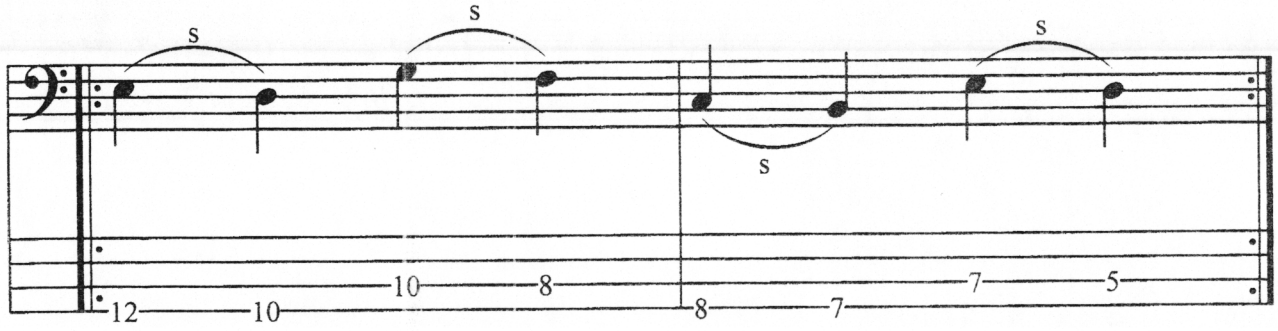

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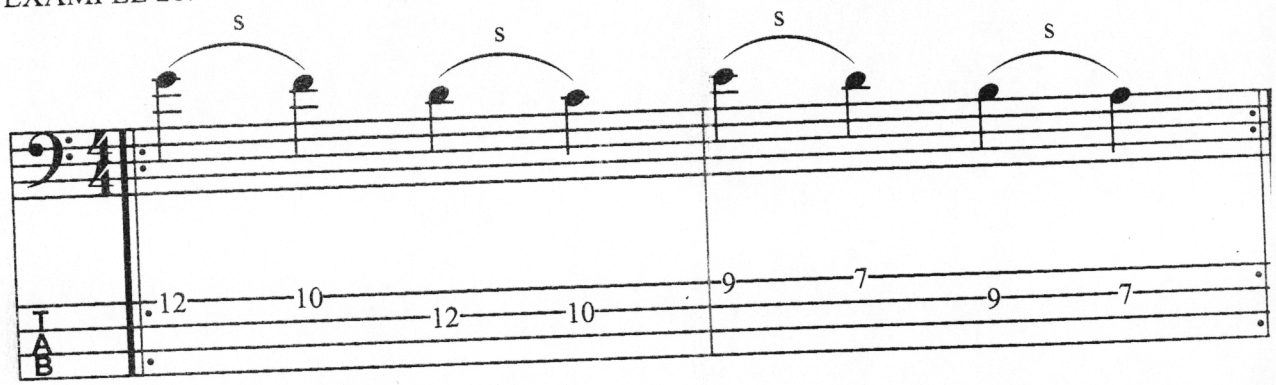

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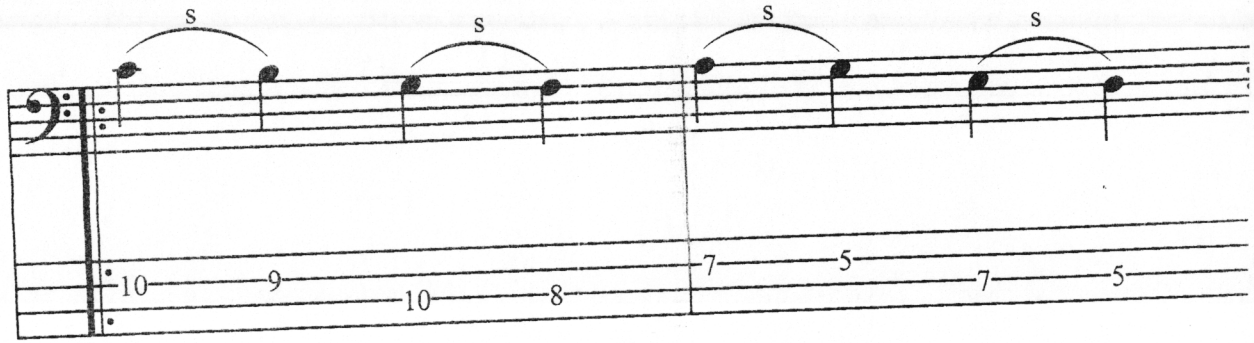

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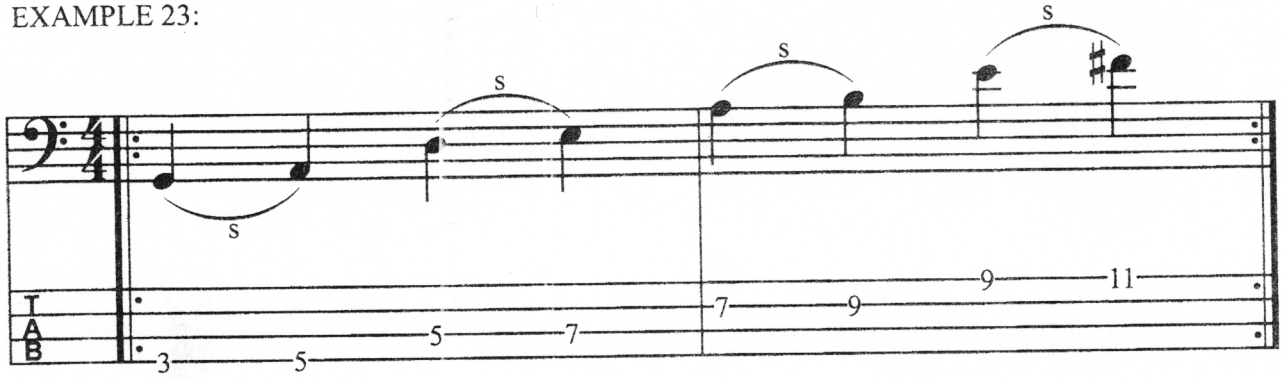

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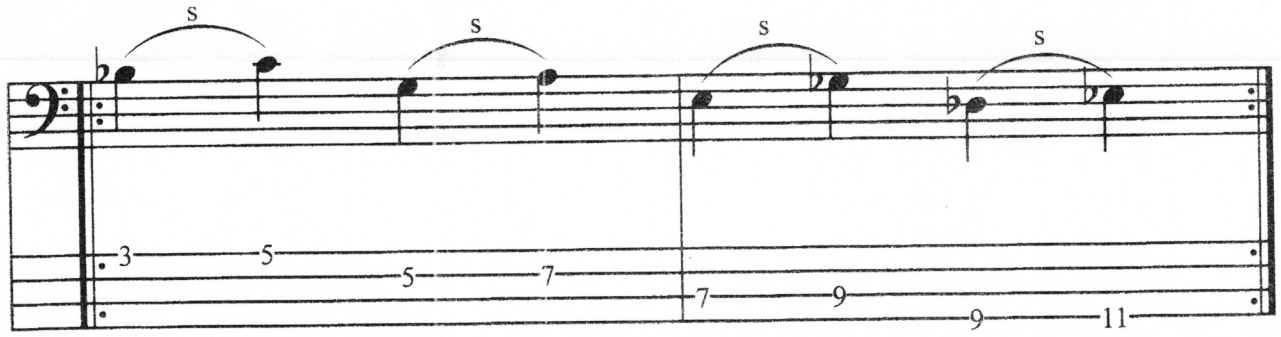

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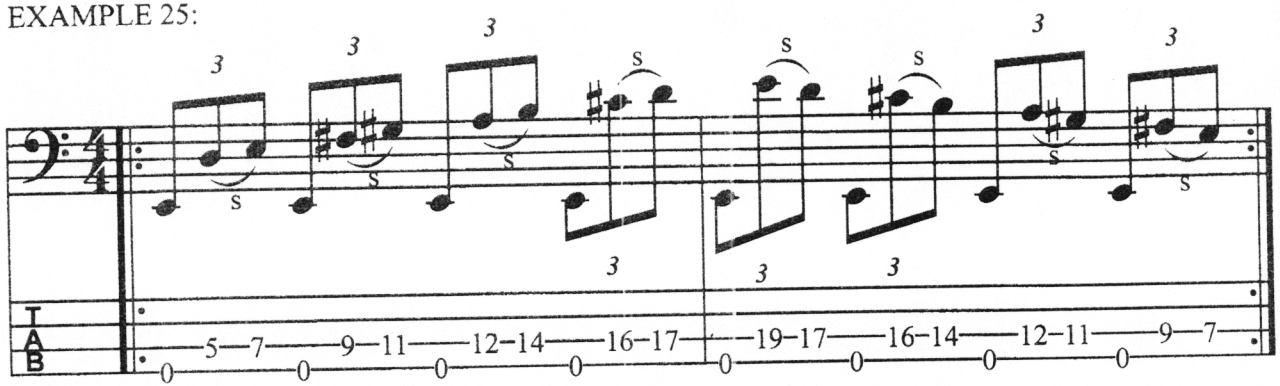

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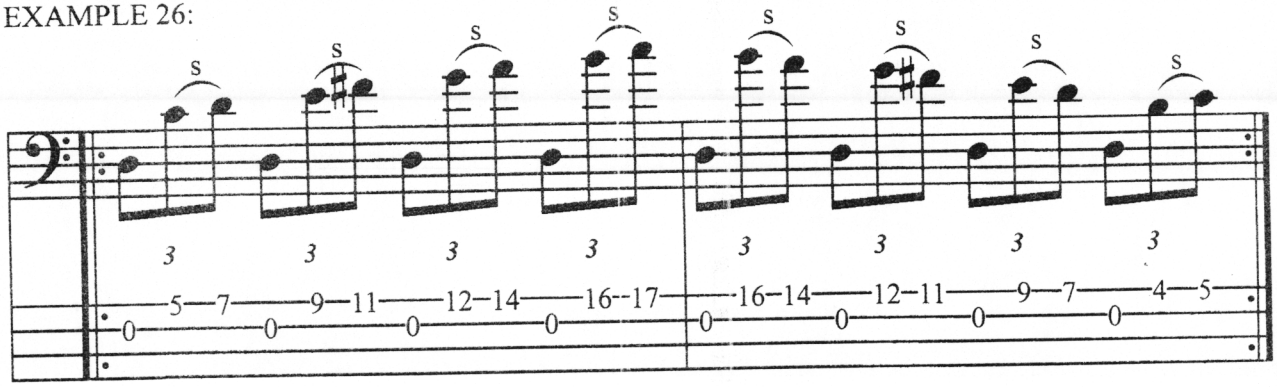

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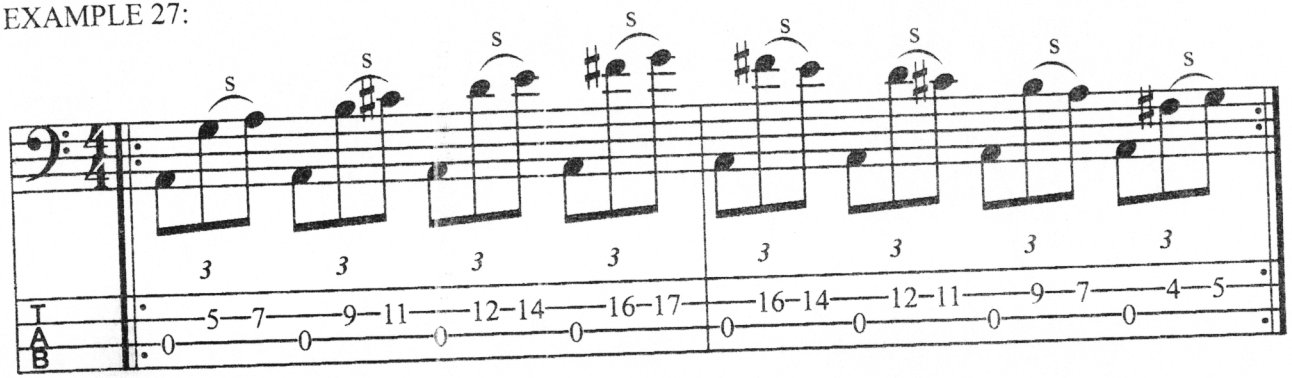

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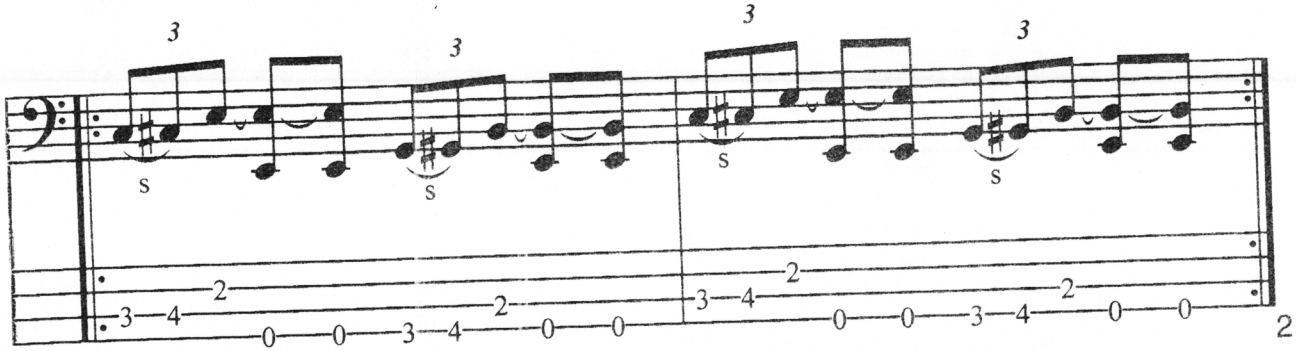

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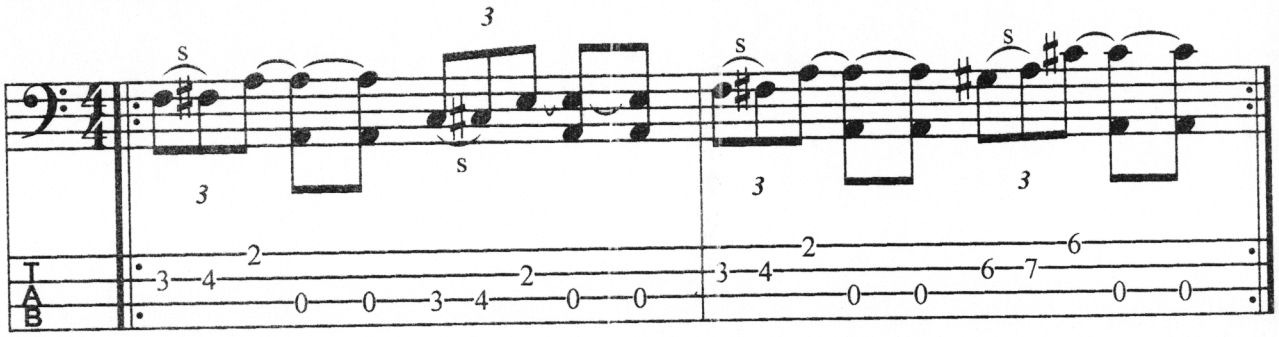

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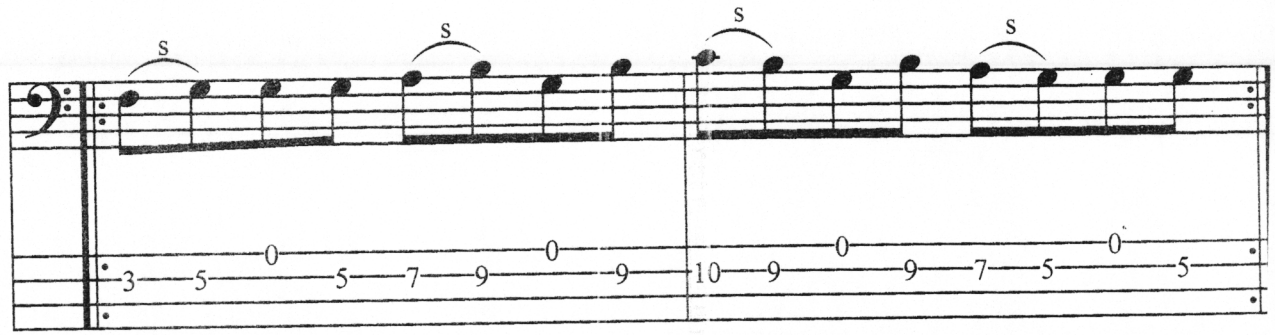

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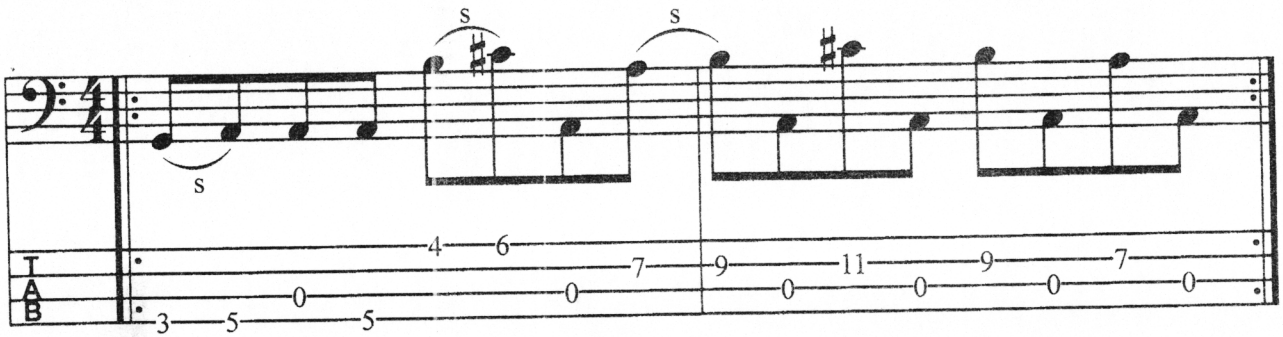

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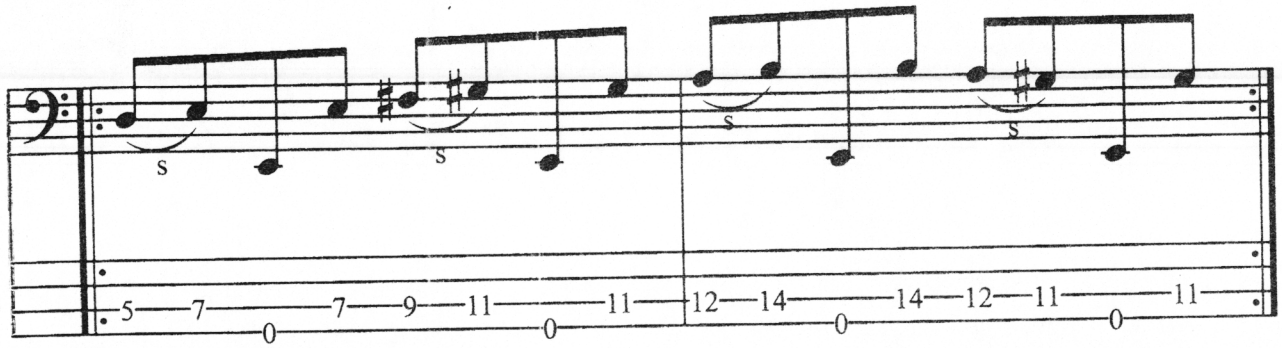

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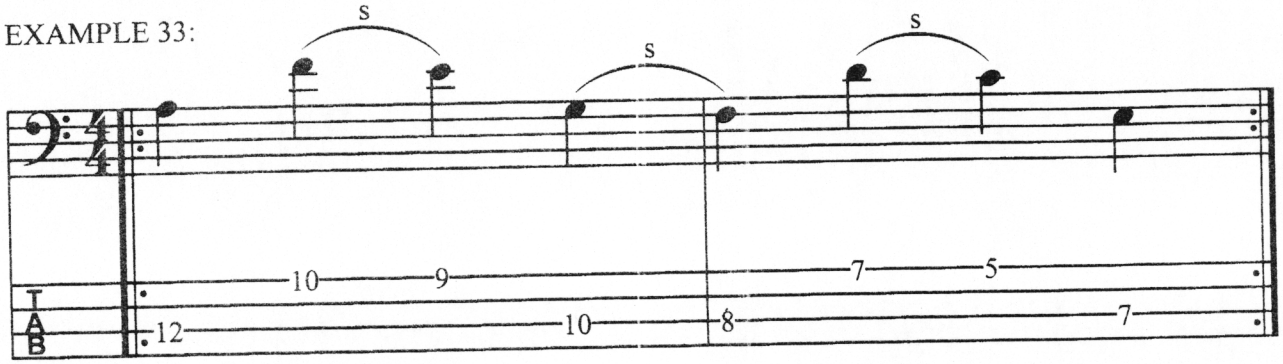

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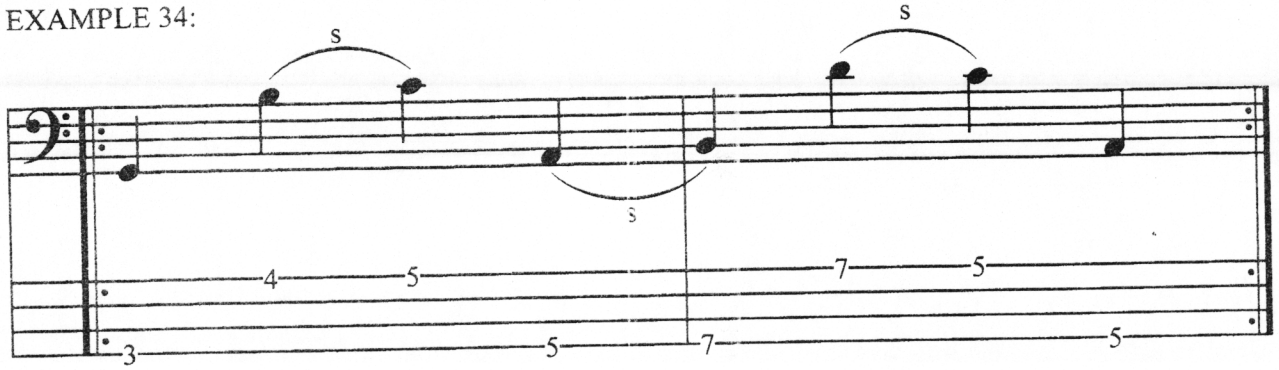

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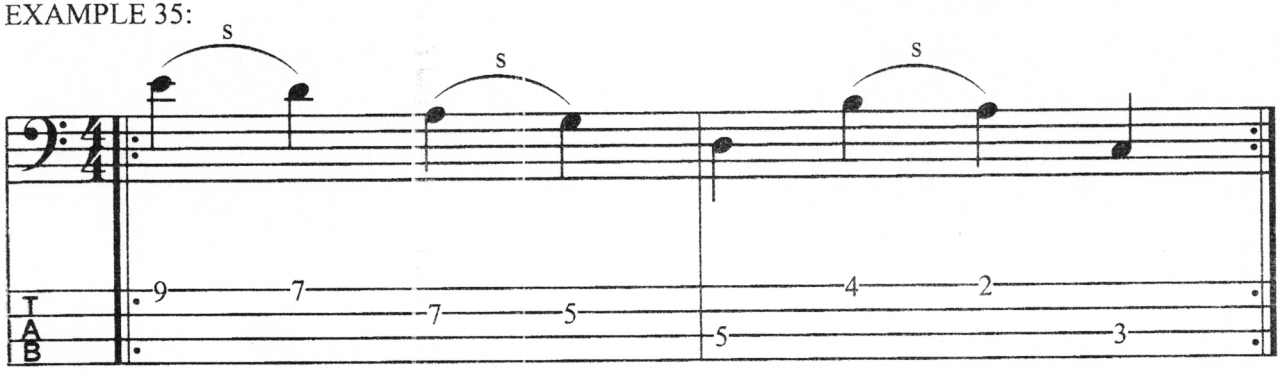

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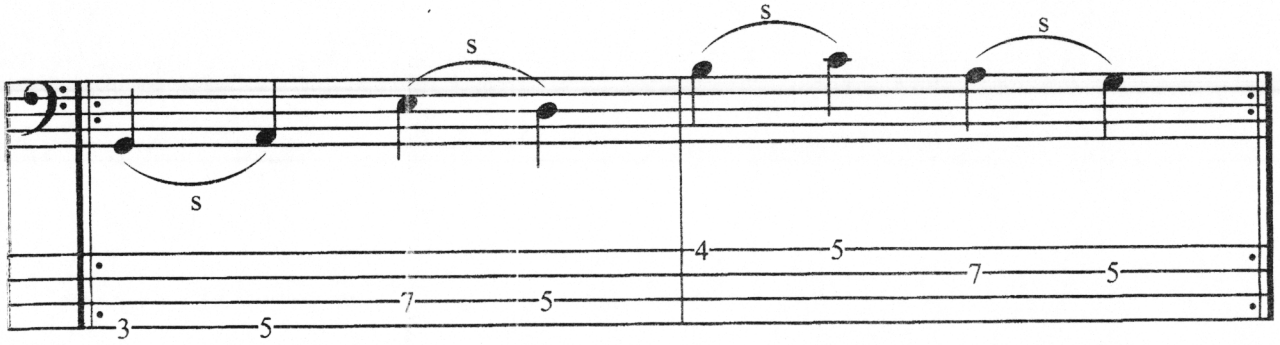

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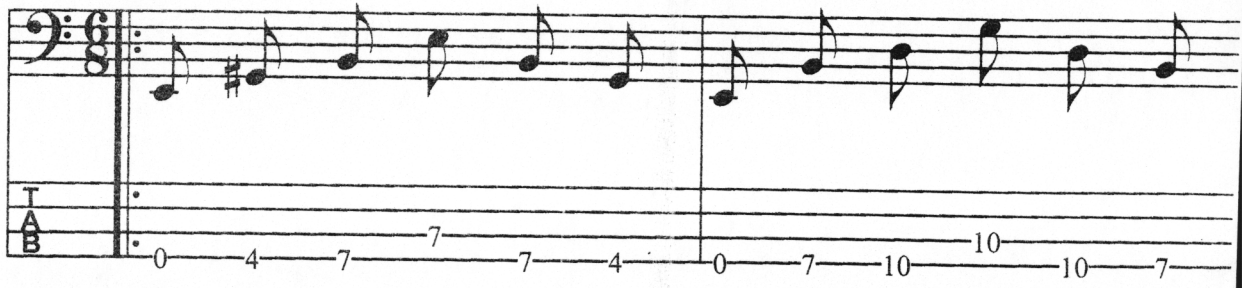

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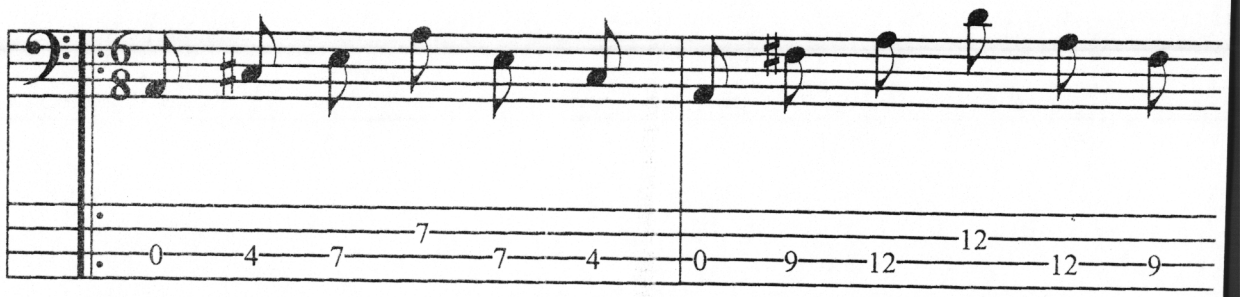
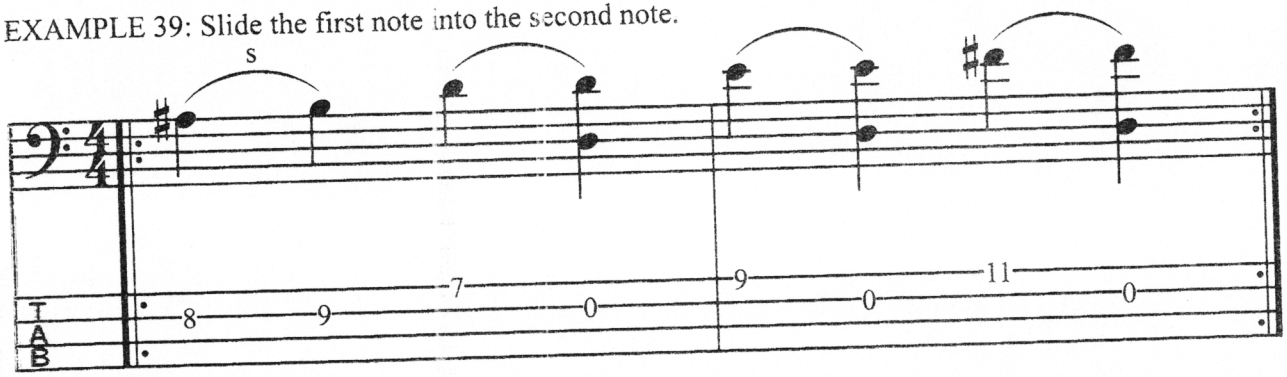
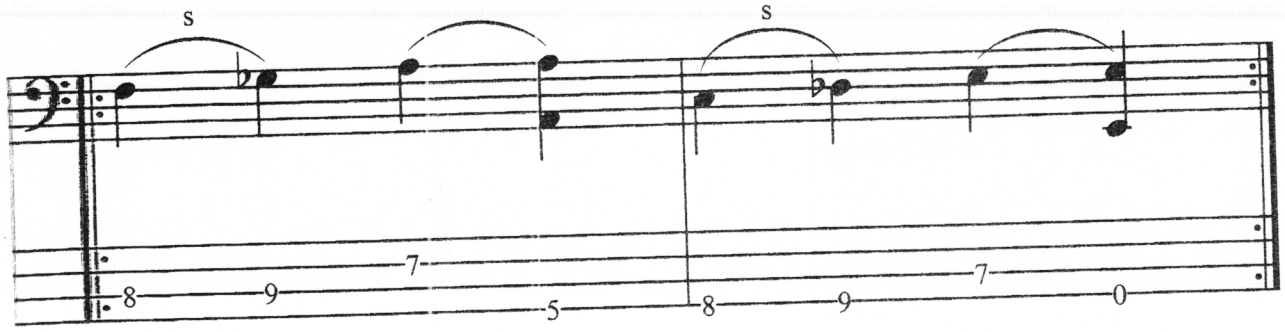


SUSTAIN: Letting notes ring out while playing other notes can create a chordal layering effect. This is a very useful technique on fretless bass.

EXAMPLE 39: Slide the first note into the second note.



EXAMPLE 40: Slide the first note into the second note on each bar.



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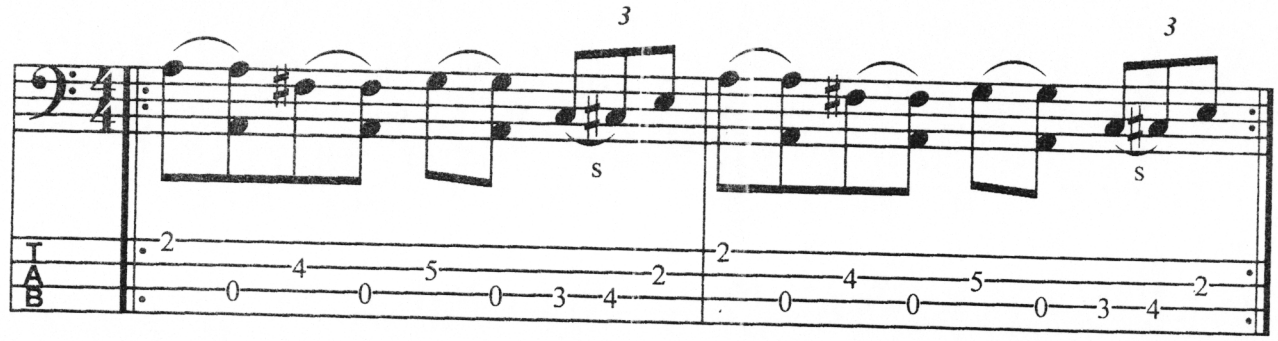

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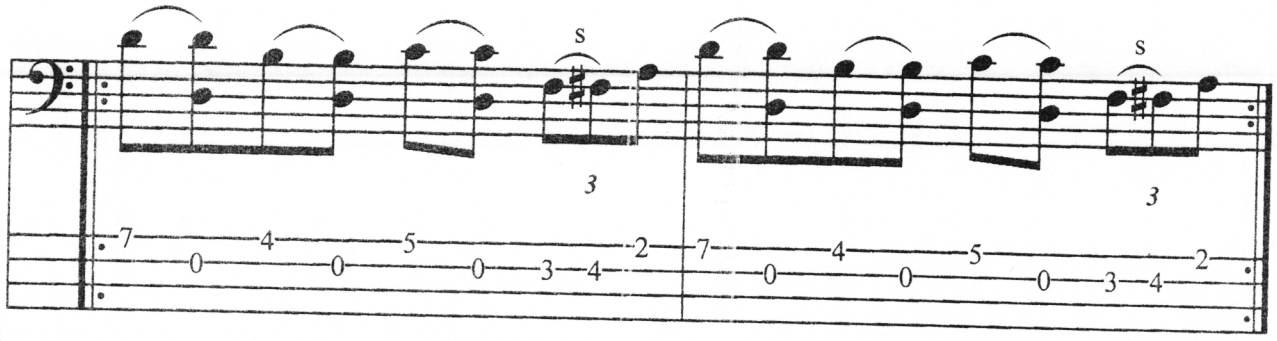

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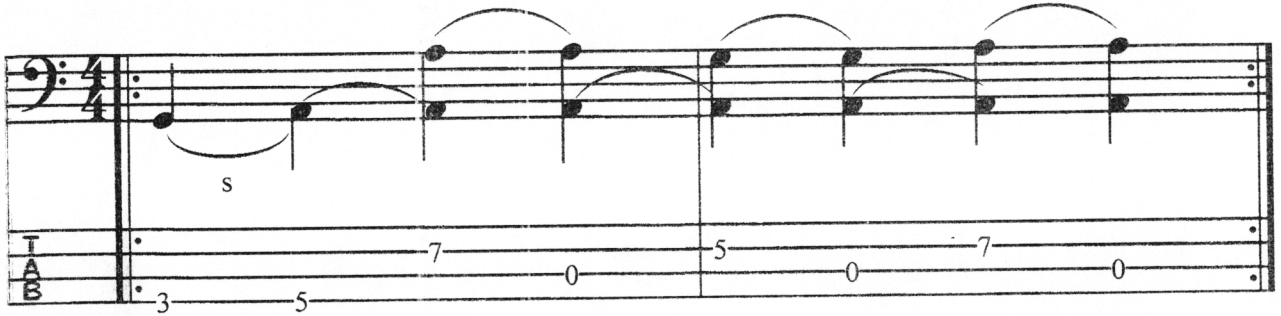

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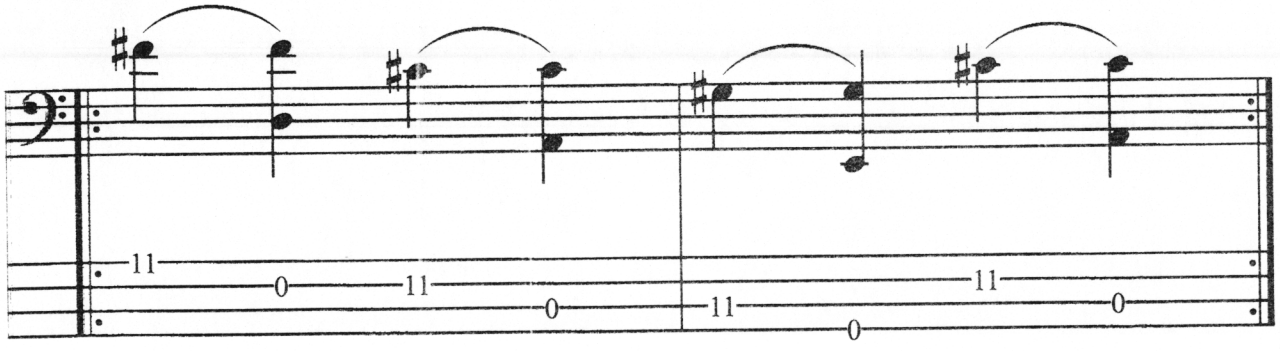

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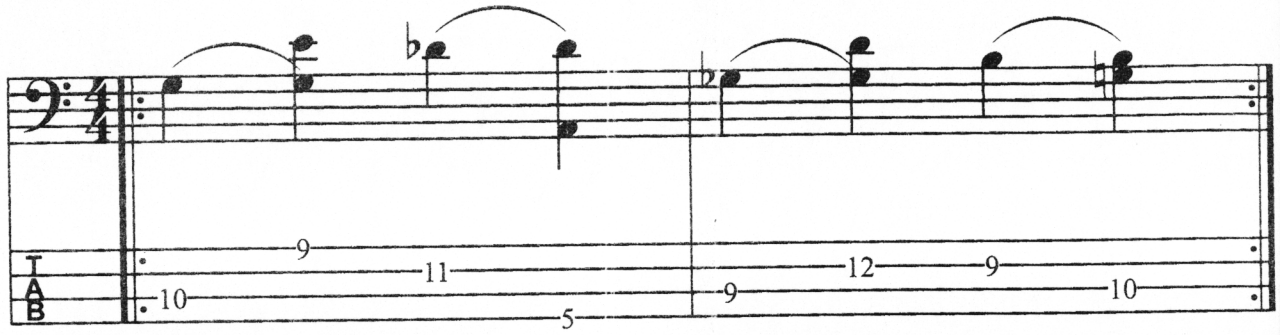

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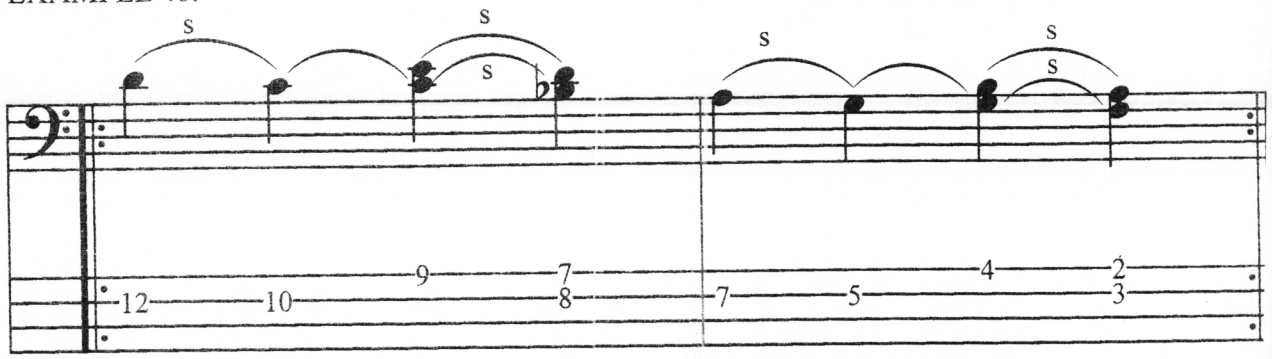

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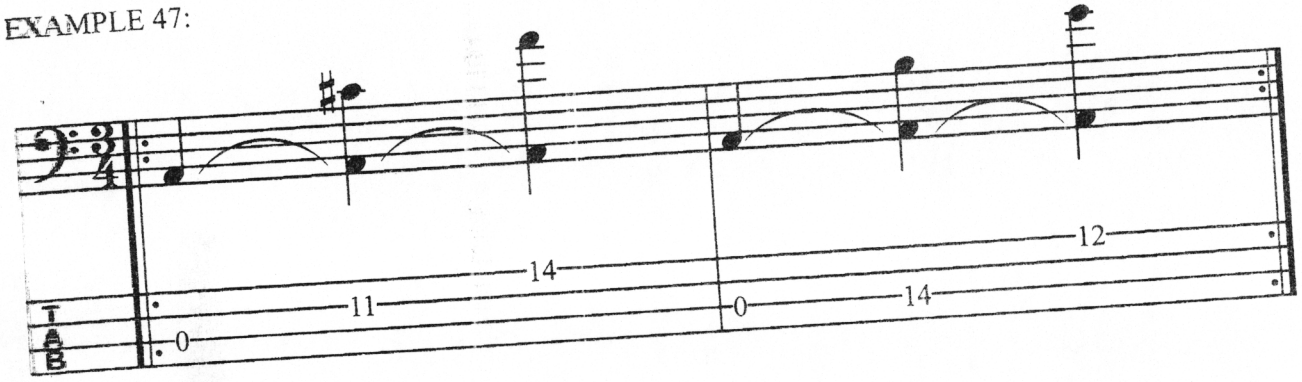

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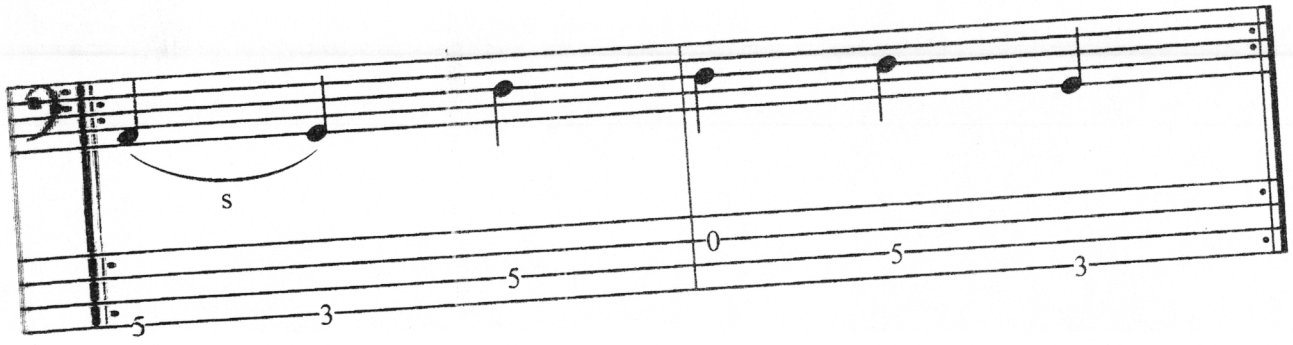

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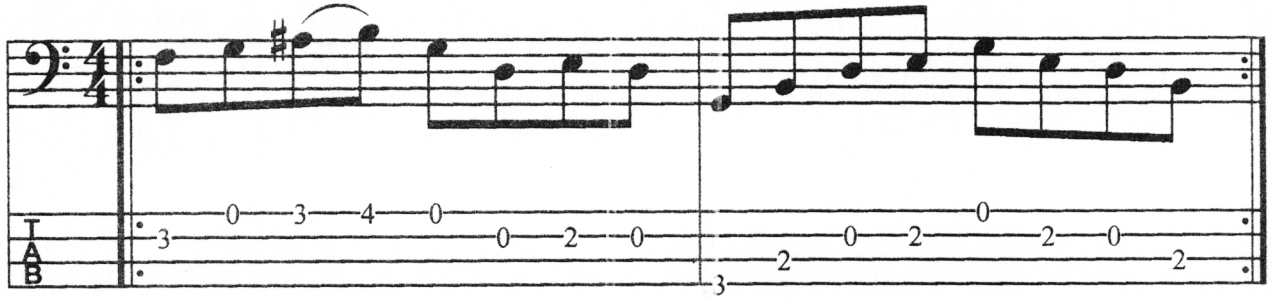

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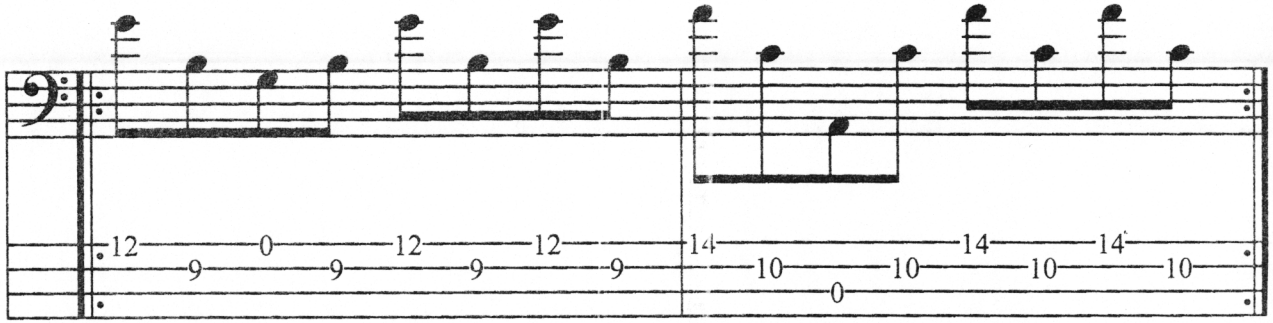

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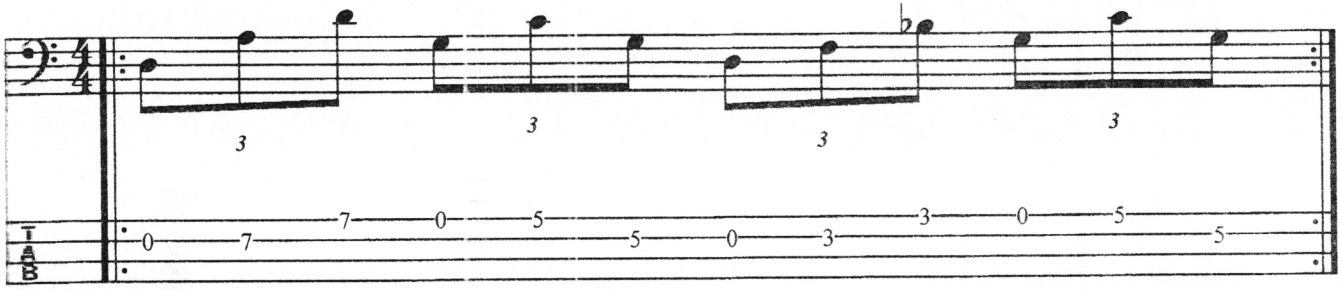

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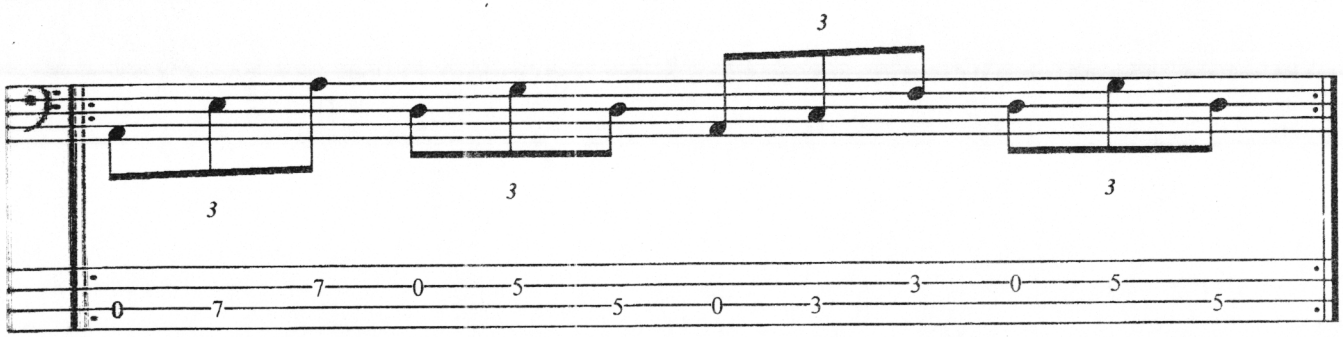

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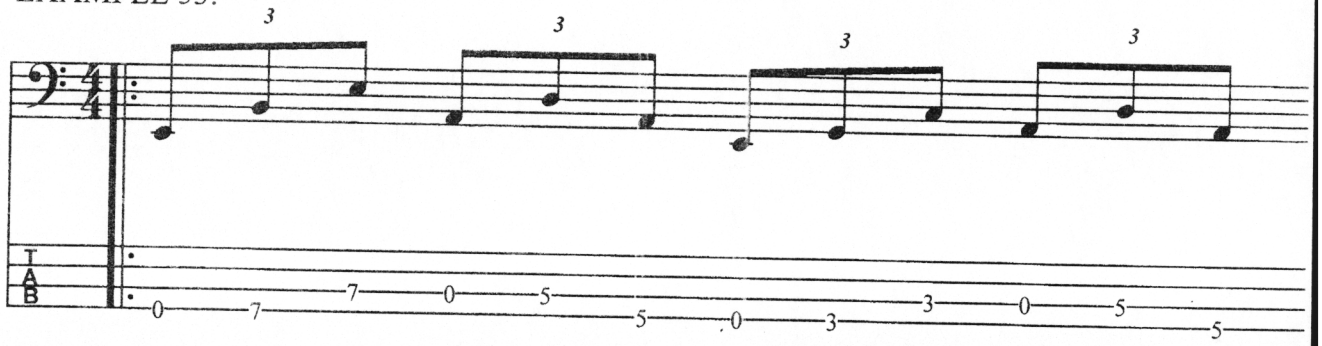

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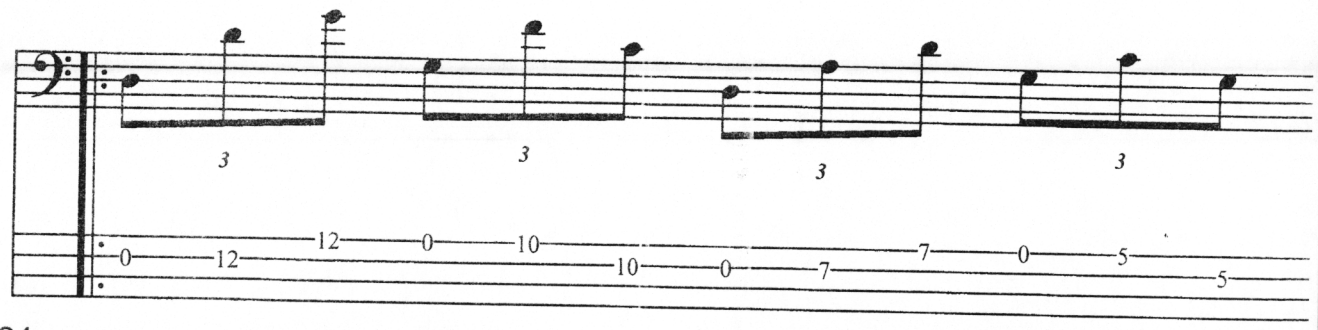

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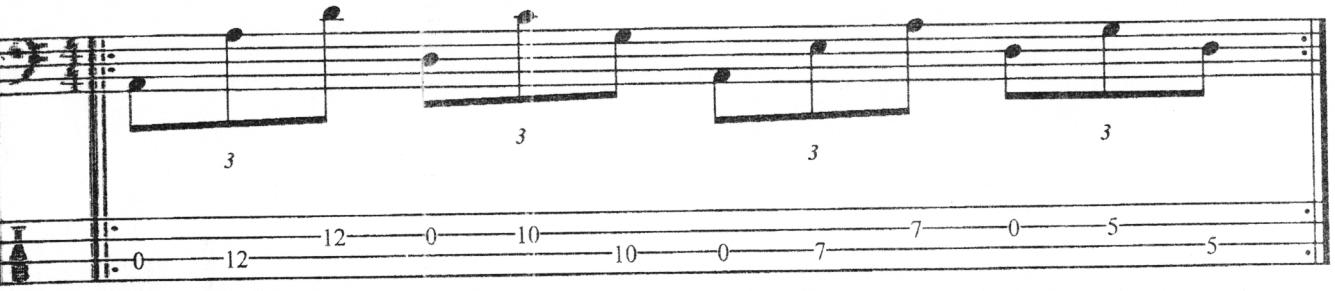

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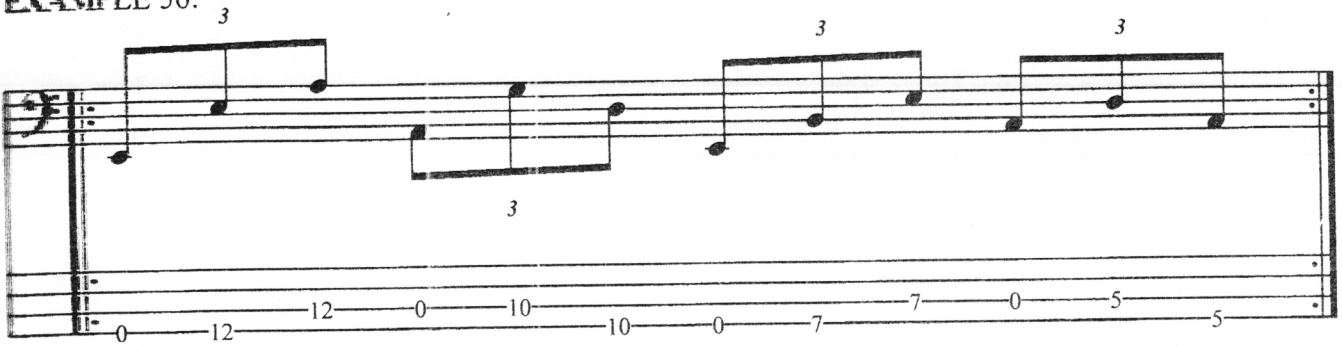

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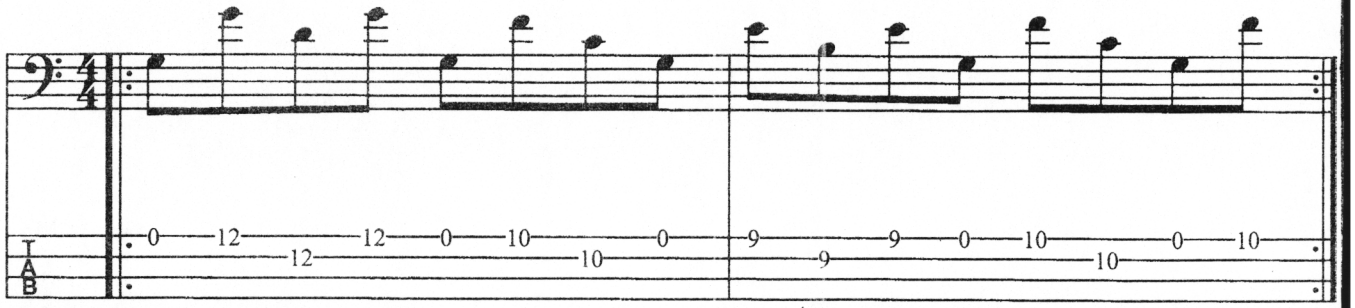

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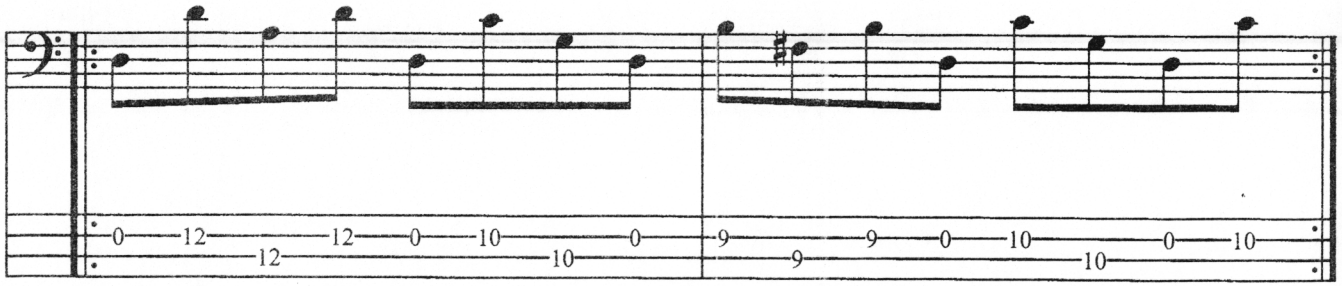

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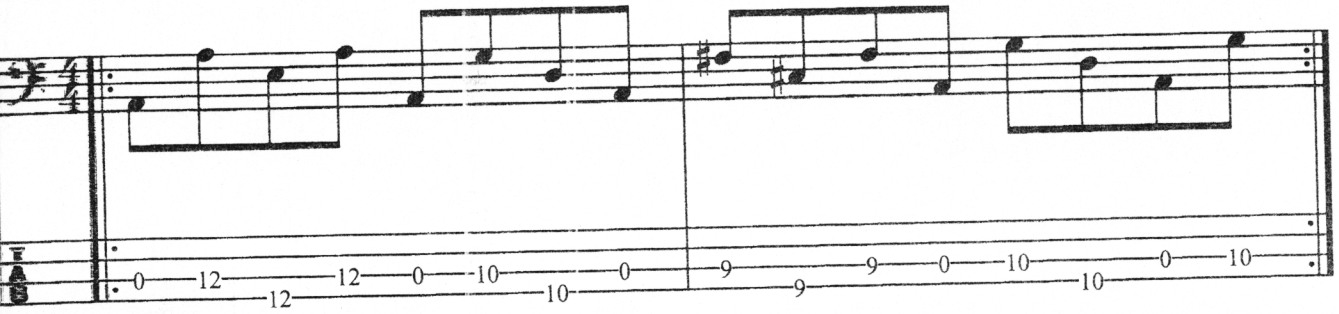

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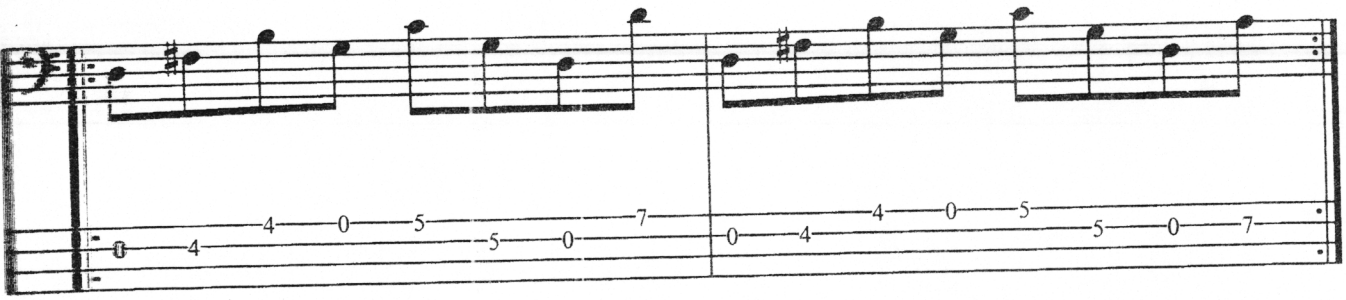

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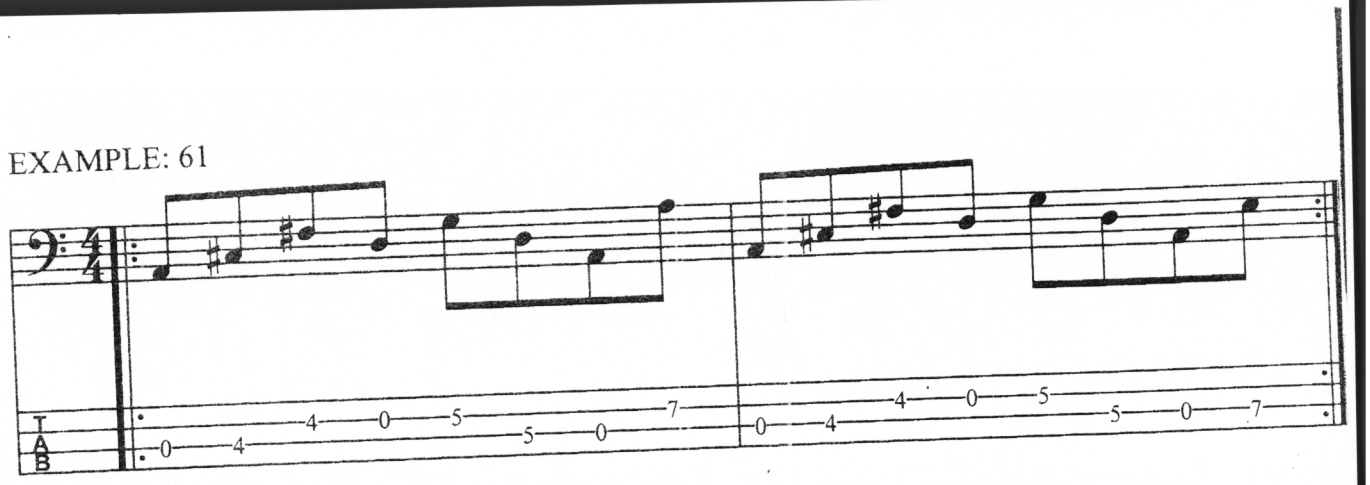

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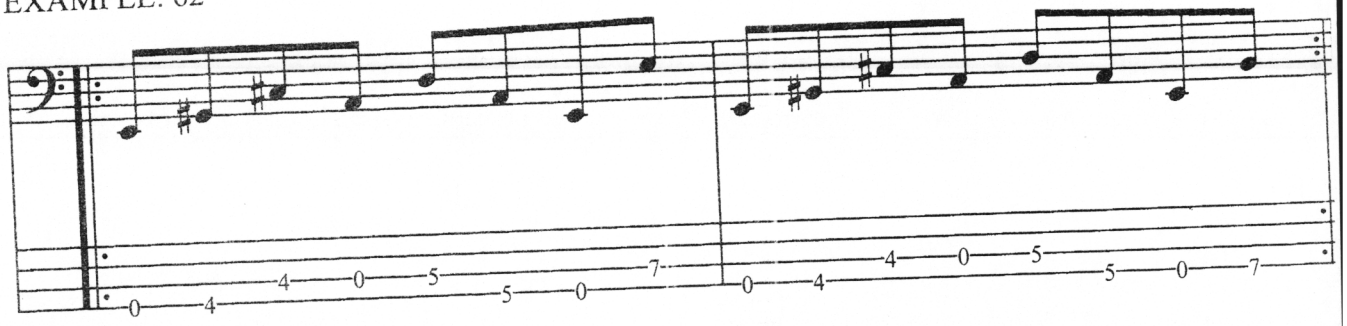

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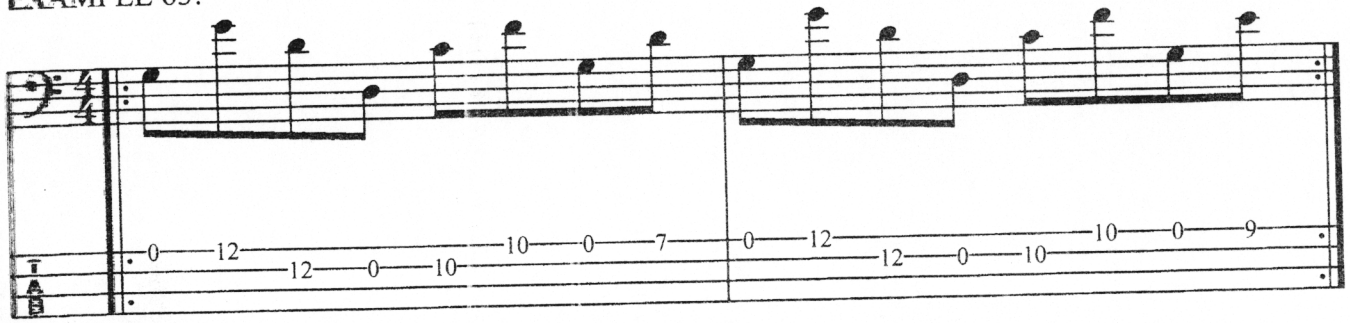

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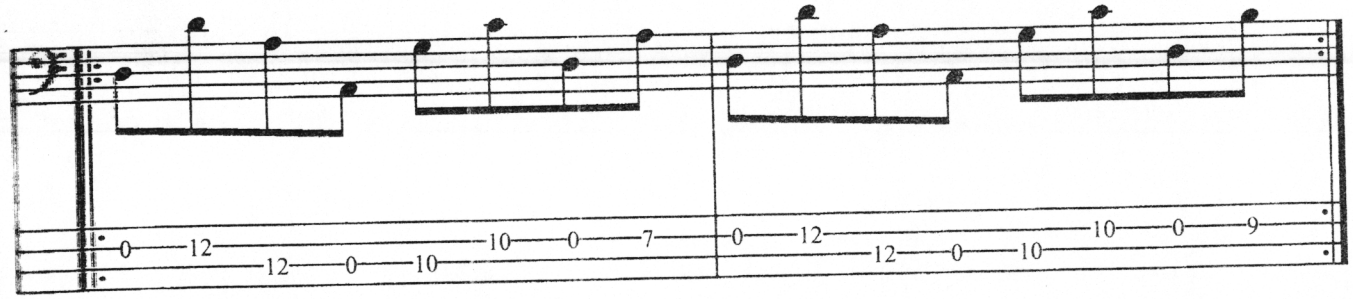

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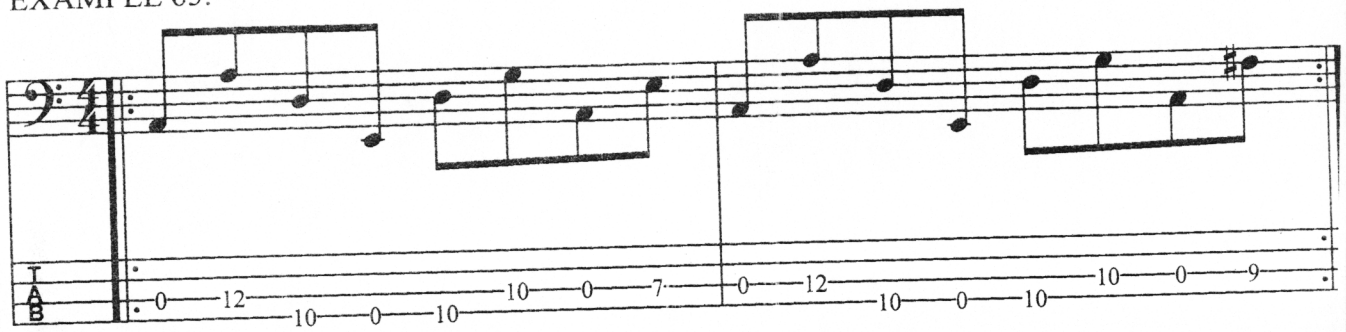

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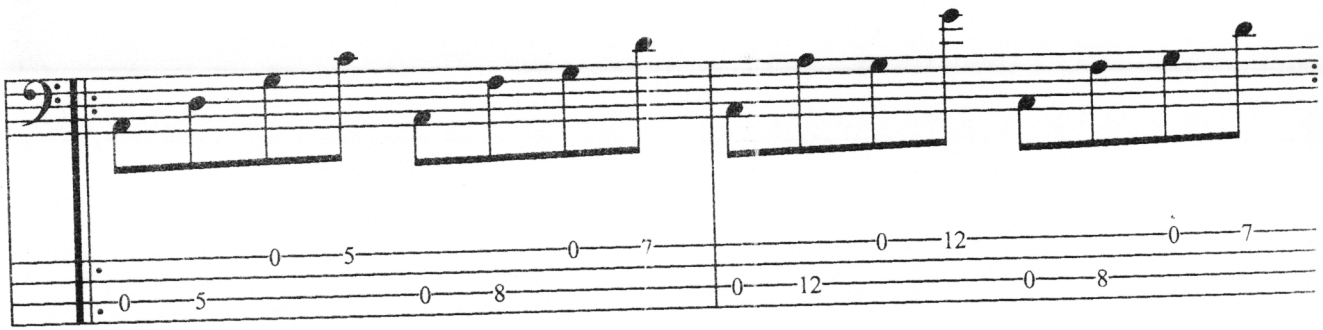

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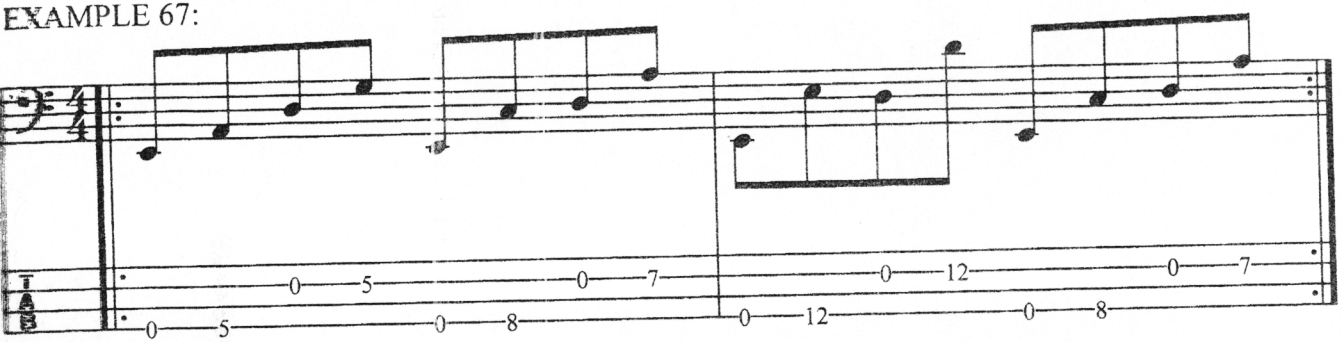

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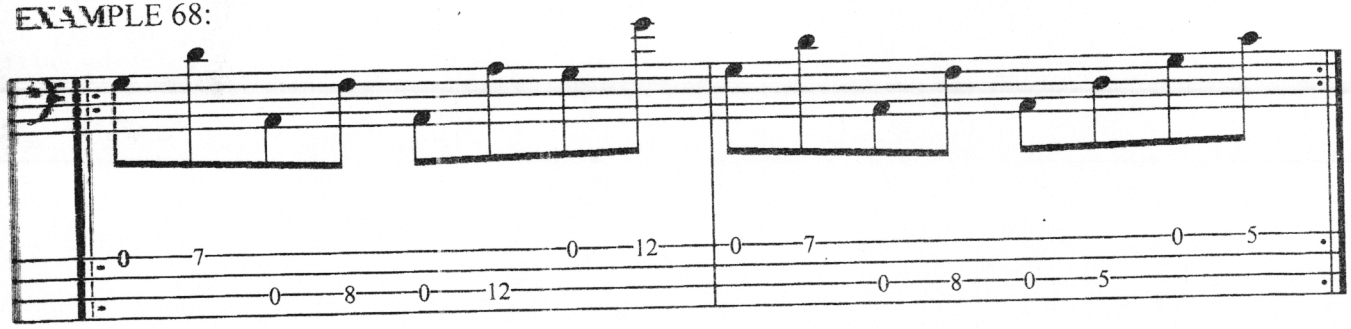

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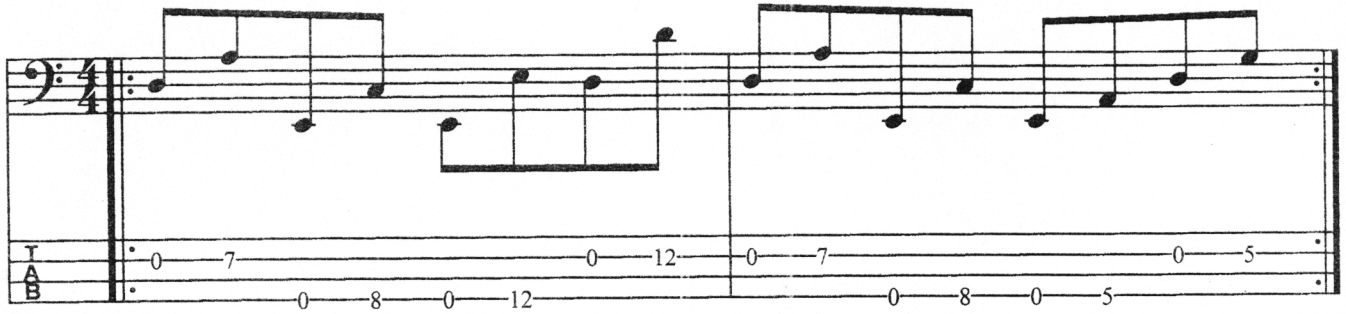

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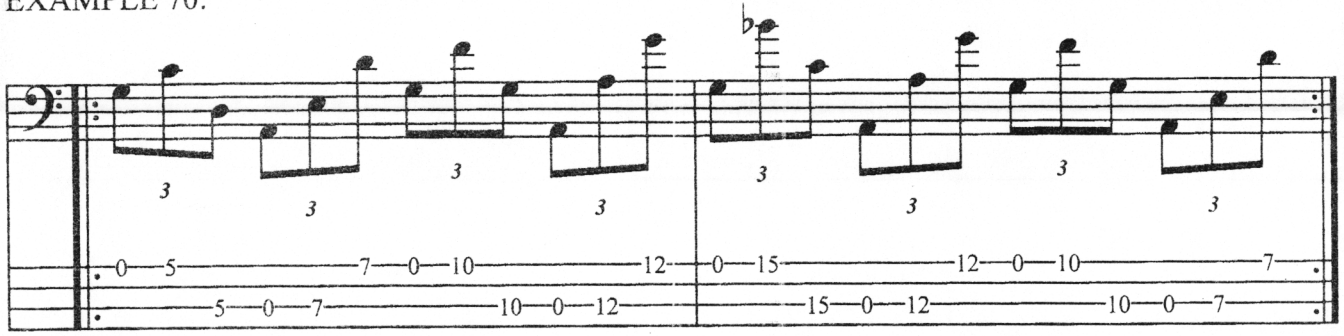

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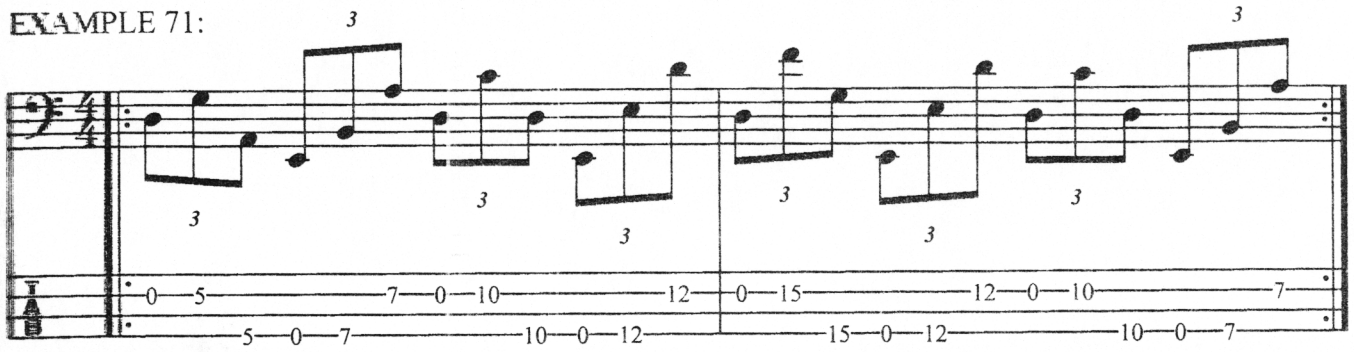

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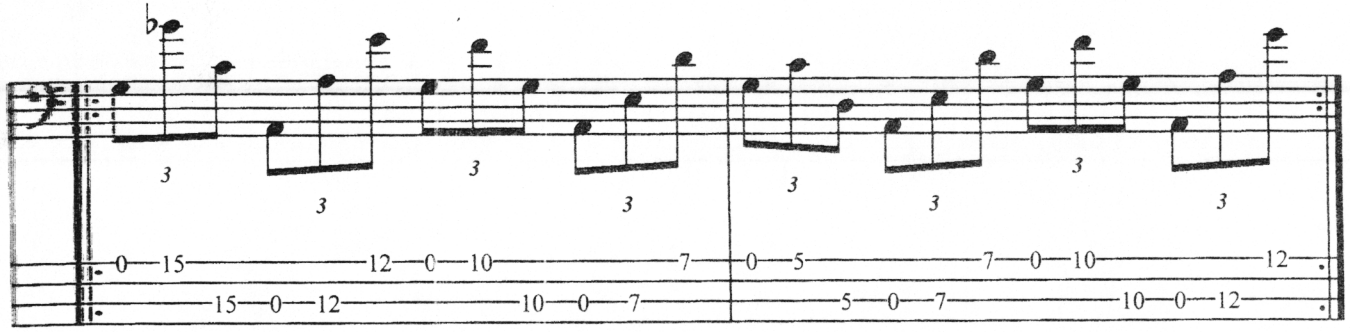

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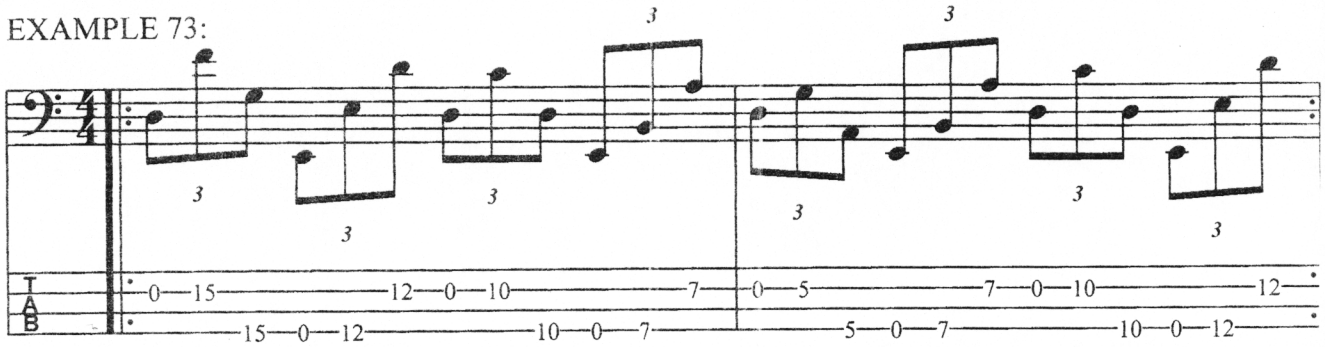

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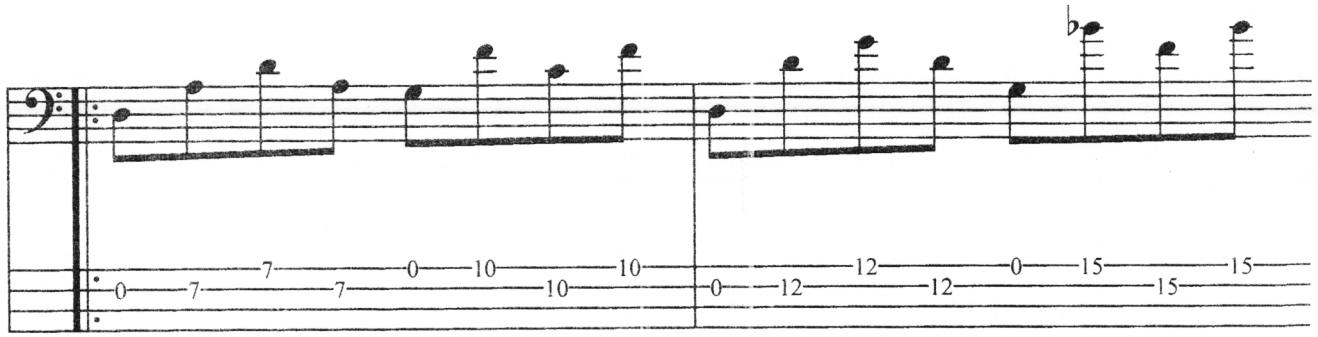

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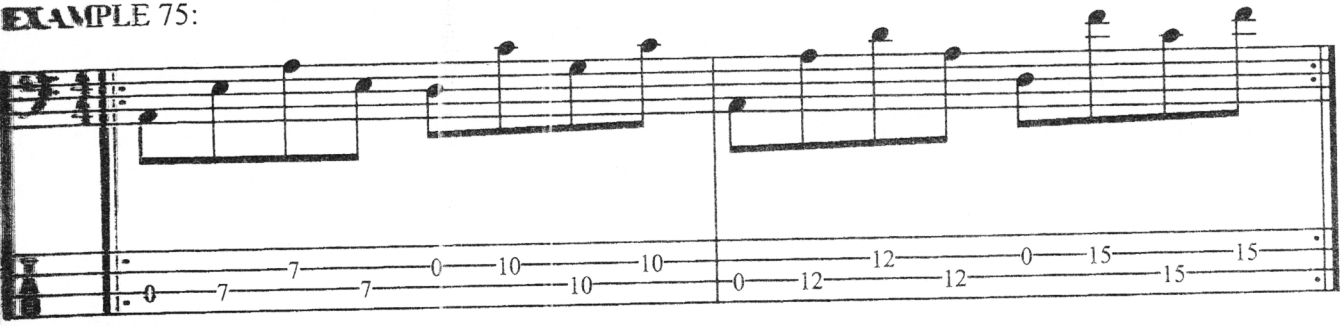

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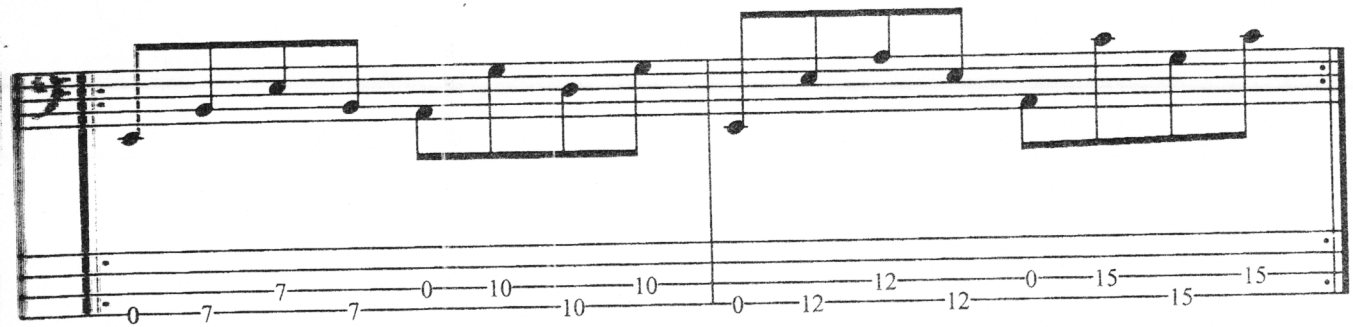

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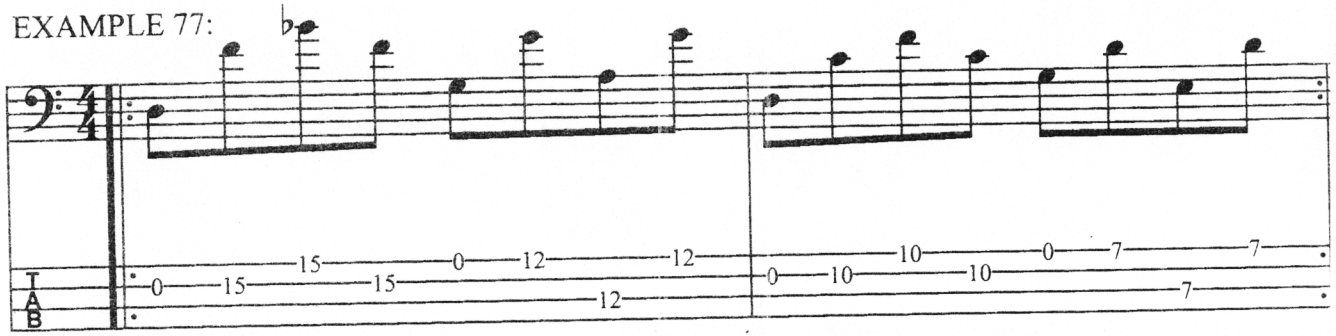

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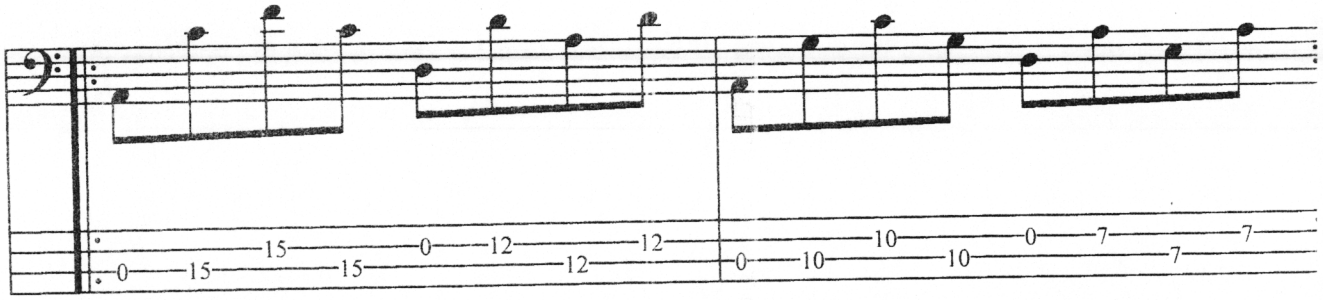

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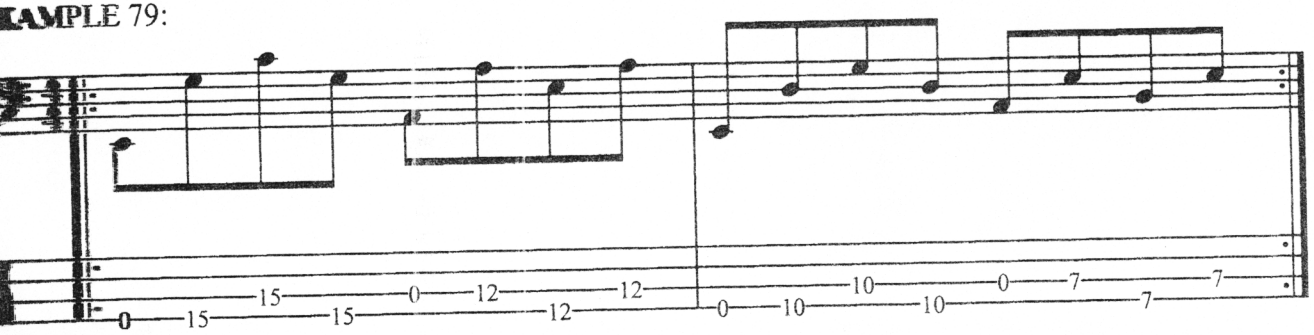

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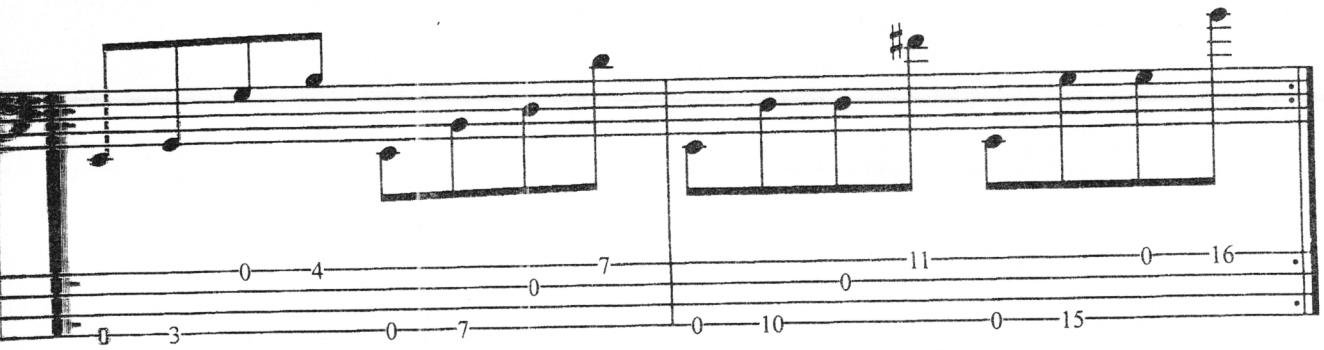

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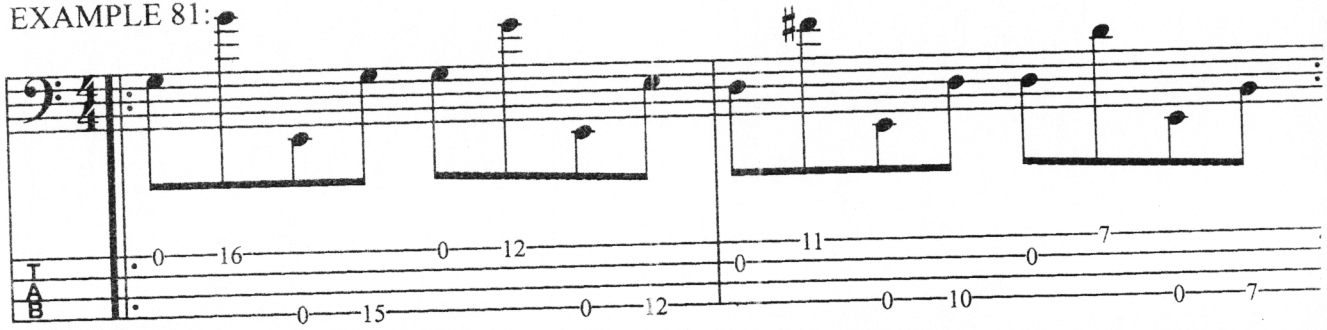

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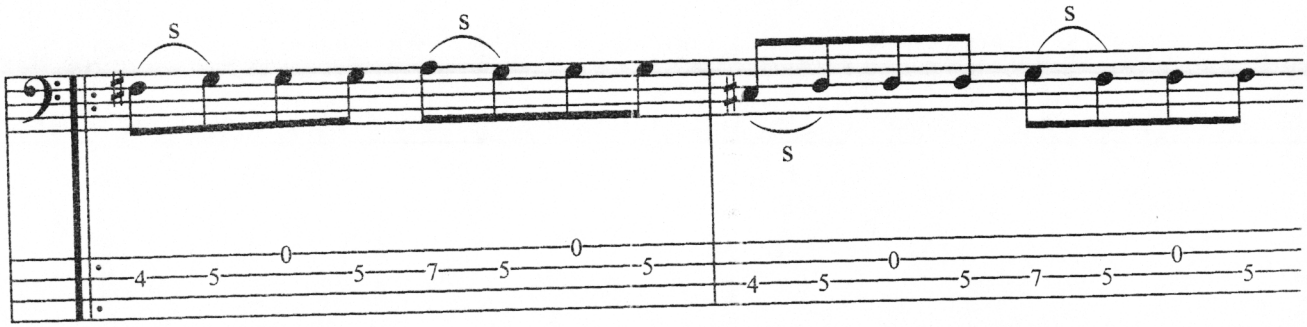

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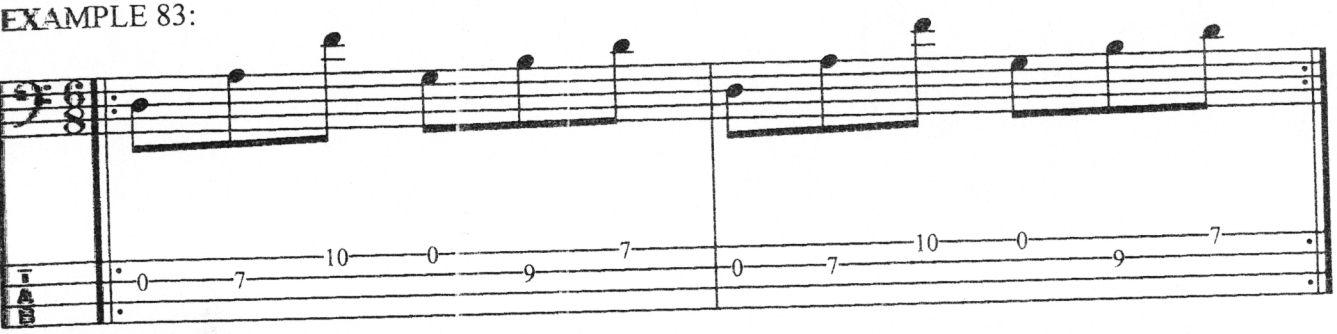

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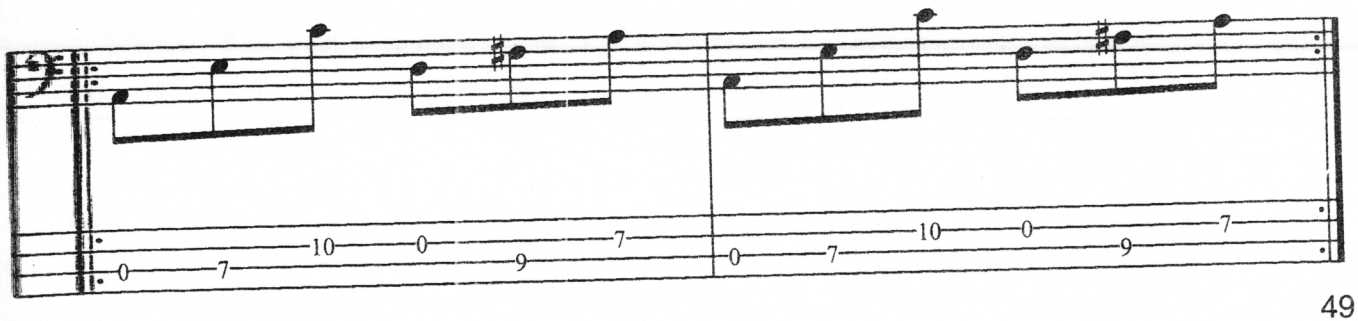

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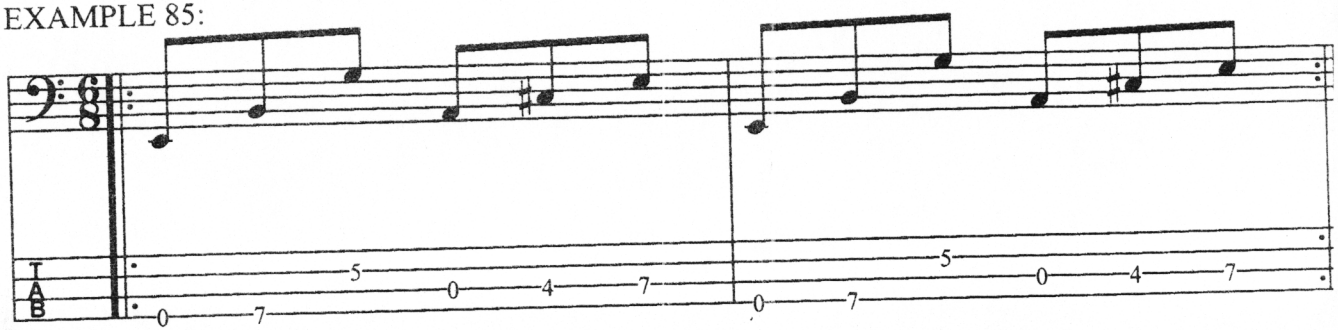

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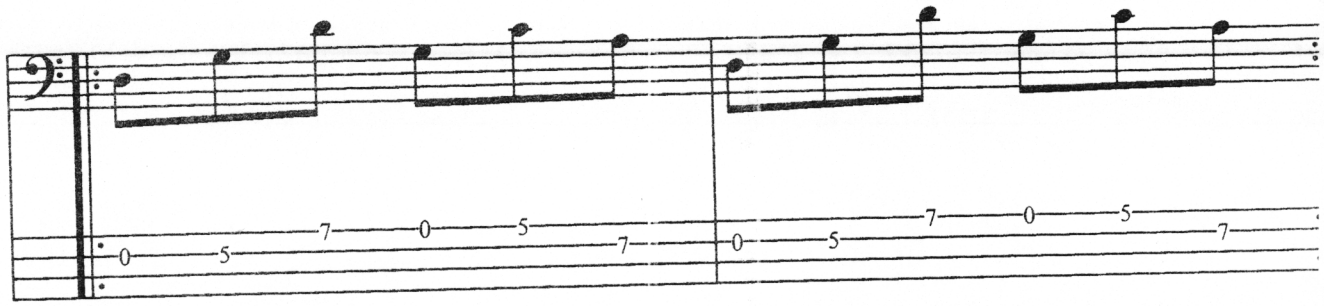

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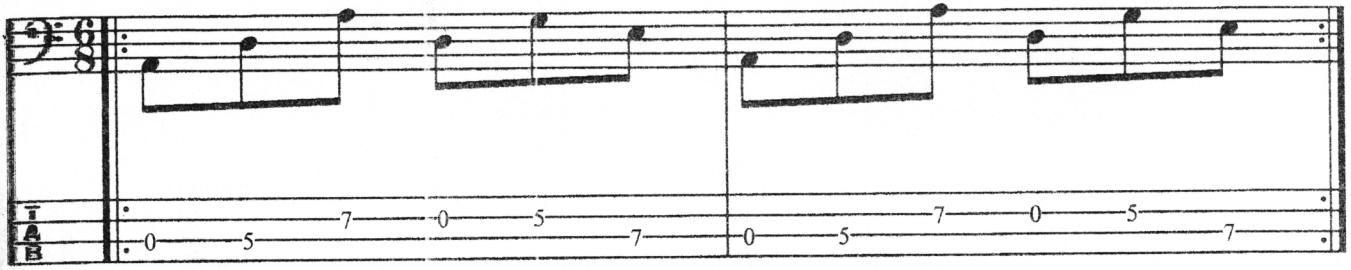

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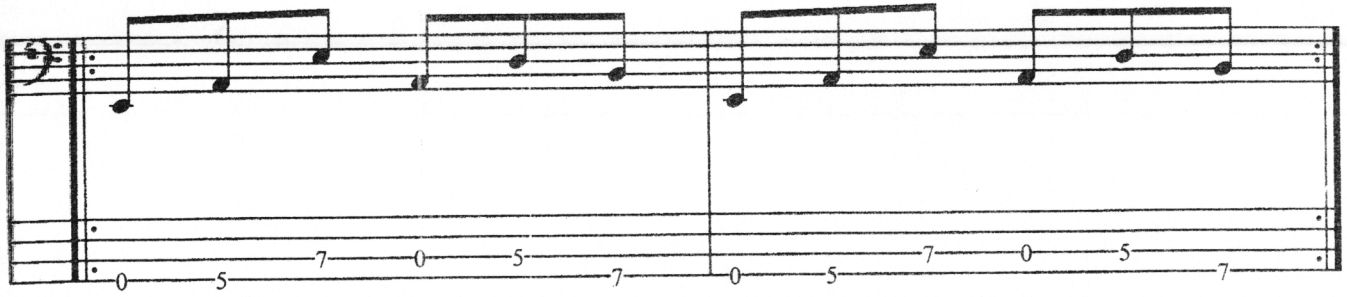

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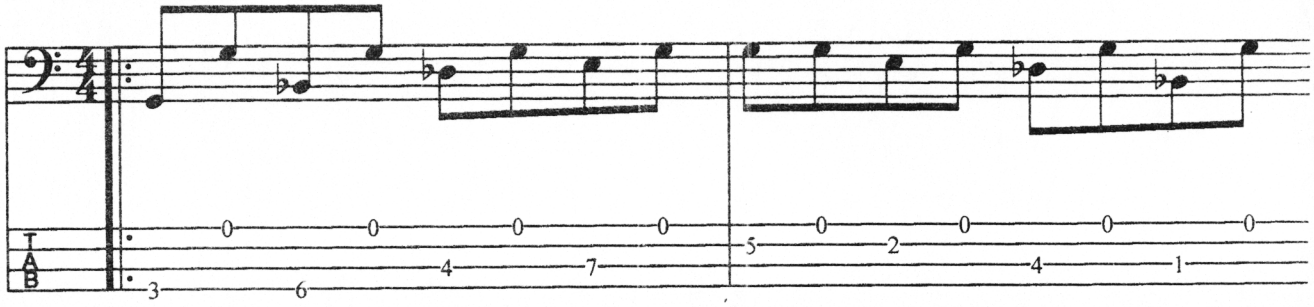

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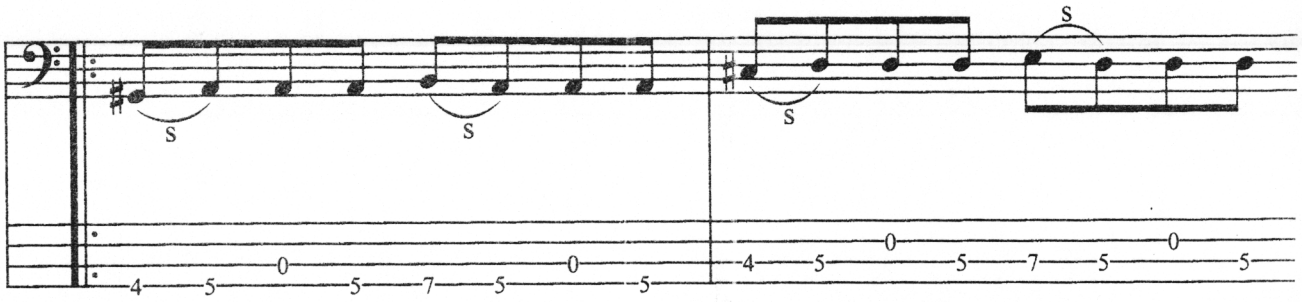
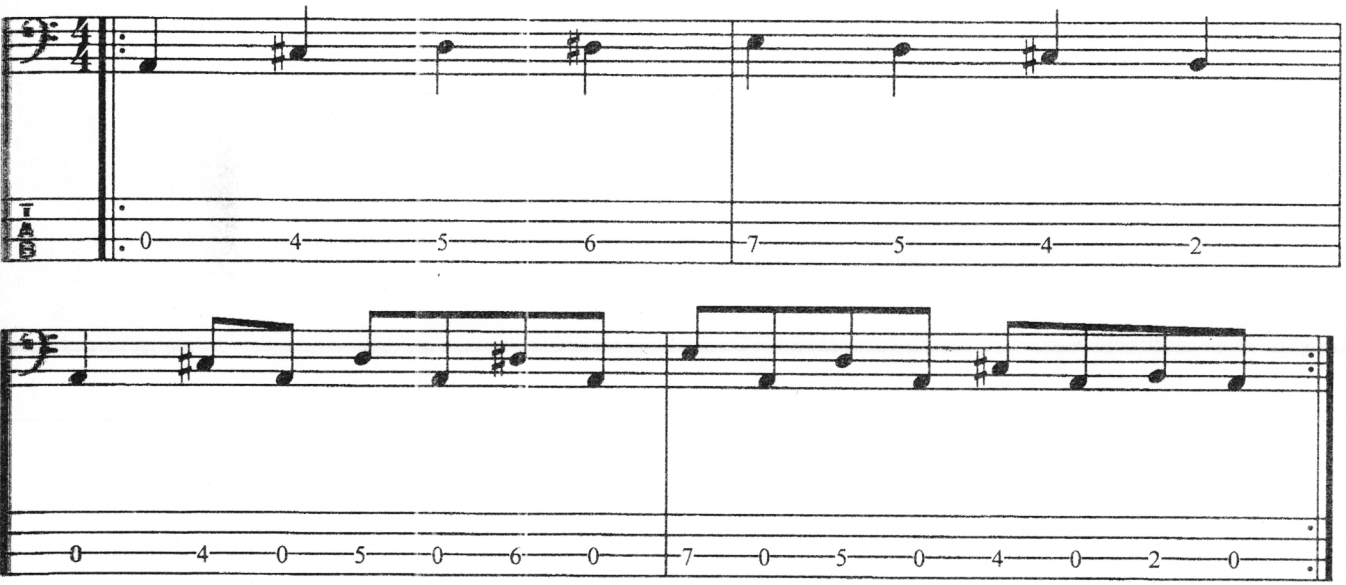
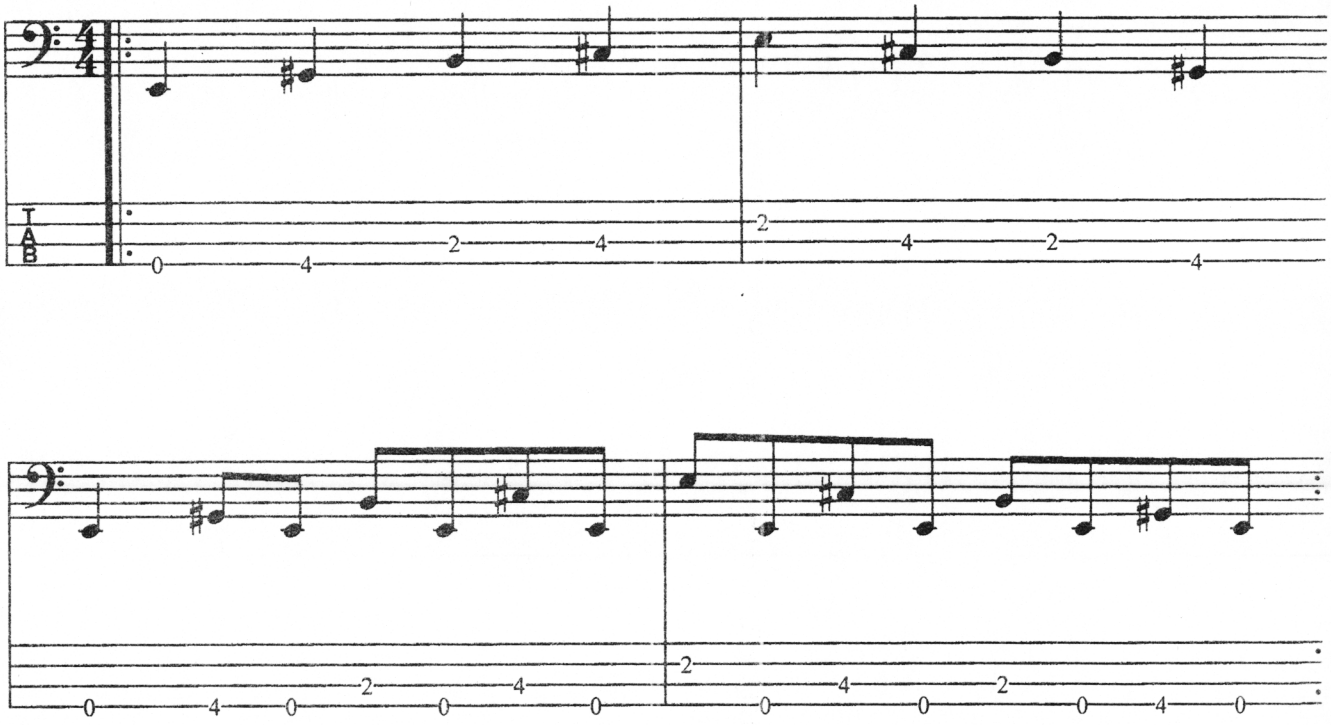


Many fretless and upright bassists use open strings regularly when playing walking bass lines. This can help check intonation as well as add a "push" like feel to the line. The following five examples demonstrate walking bass lines that alternate a straight feel and a push feel every two bars.

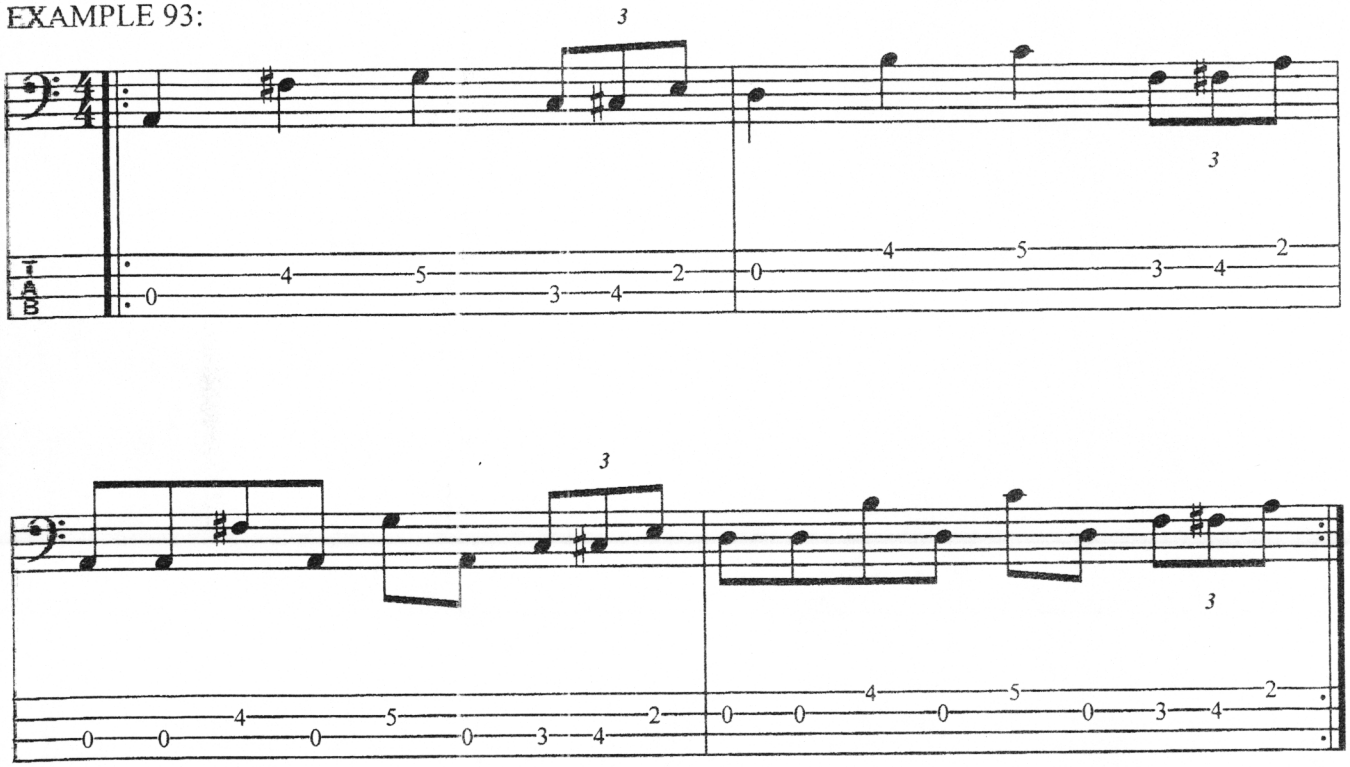
EXAMPLE 91:



EXAMPLE 92:



EXAMPLE 93:



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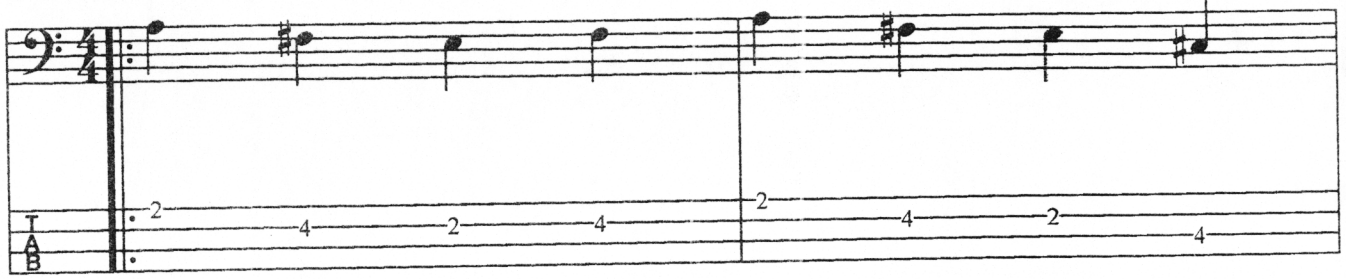

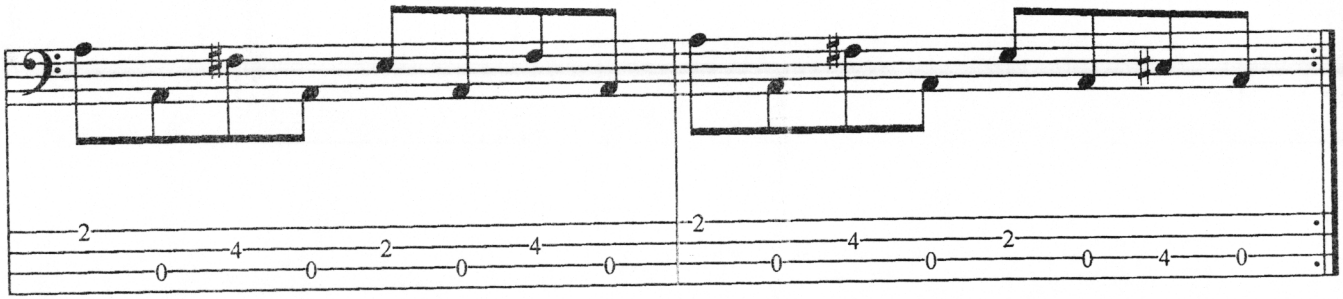

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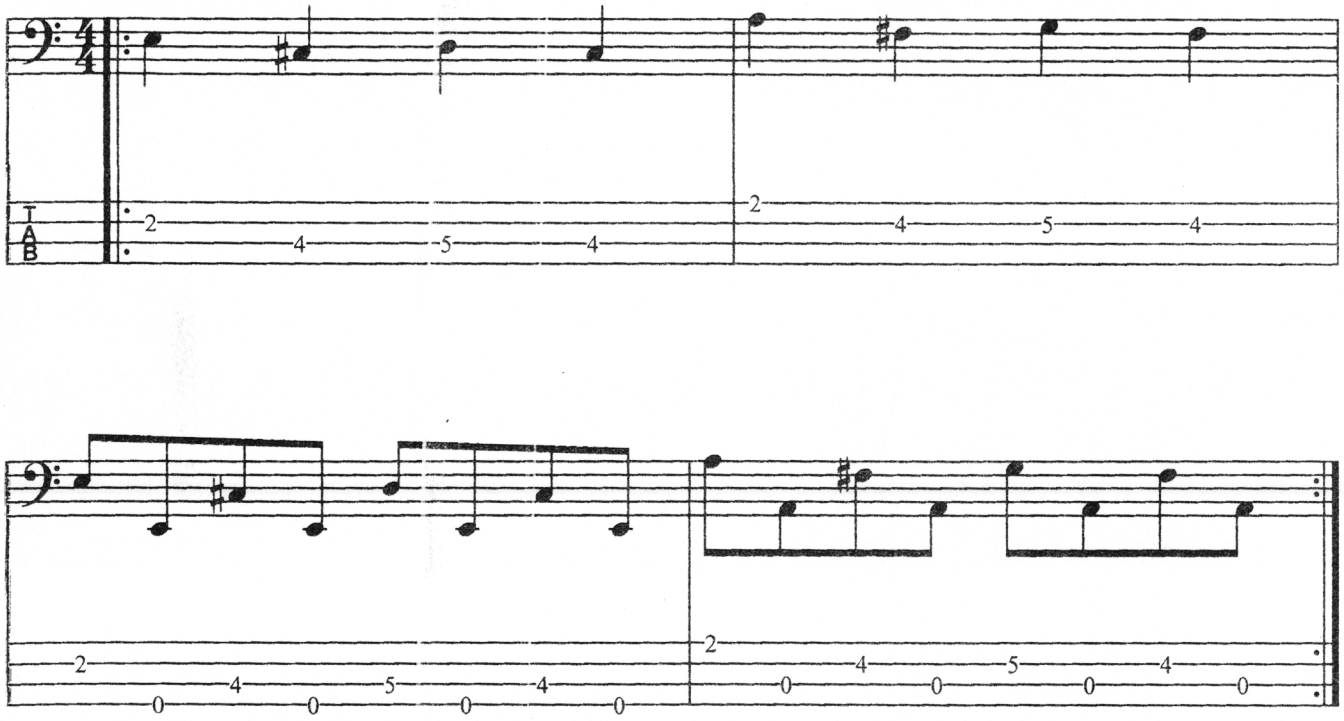
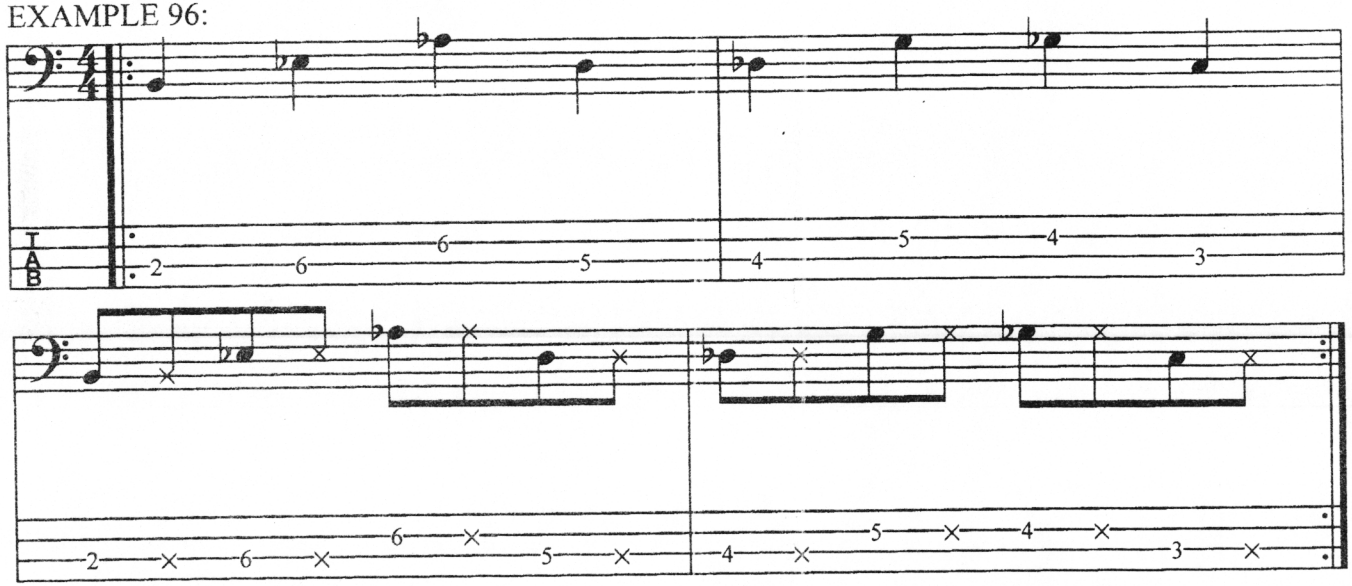


Slap bass has been a popular technique with upright bassists for many years. Many walking bass lines in New Orleans Jazz, Bluegrass, Rockabilly, Country, etc, use slap bass. This walking slap bass technique can be applied to fretless bass. In the following five examples I pop all the notes with my right hand index finger. I play all the muted notes by striking the strings with my right hand thumb. When I strike I mute the strings with my left hand.

EXAMPLE 96:



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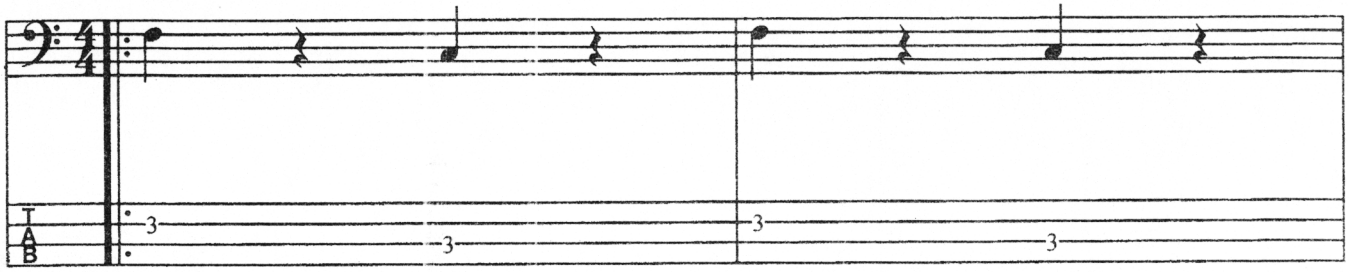

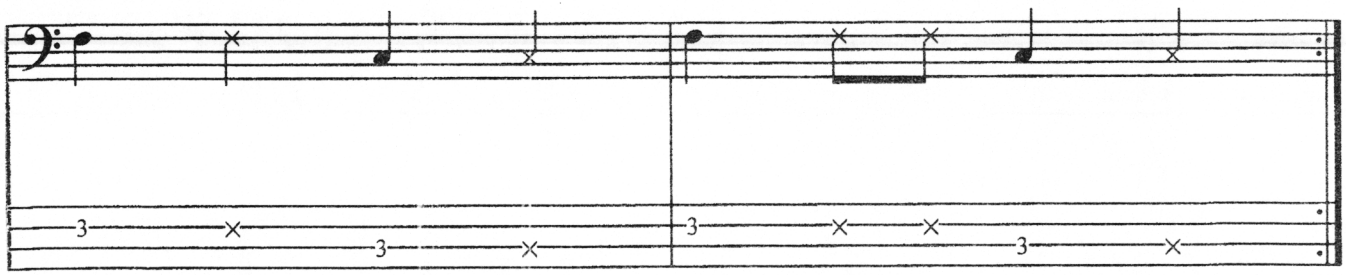

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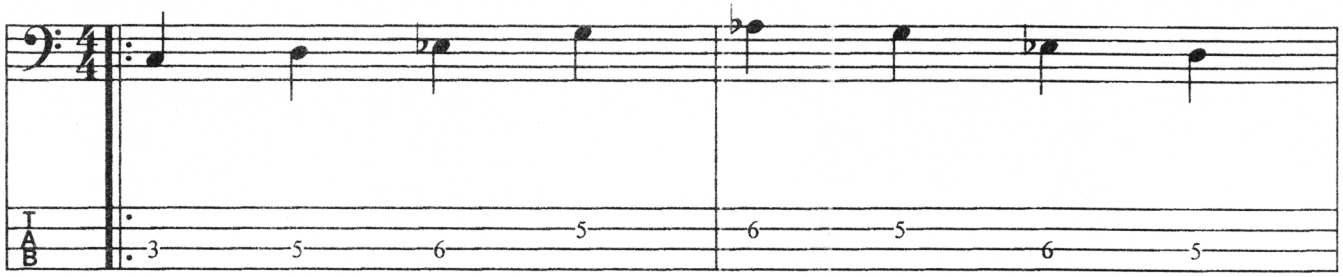
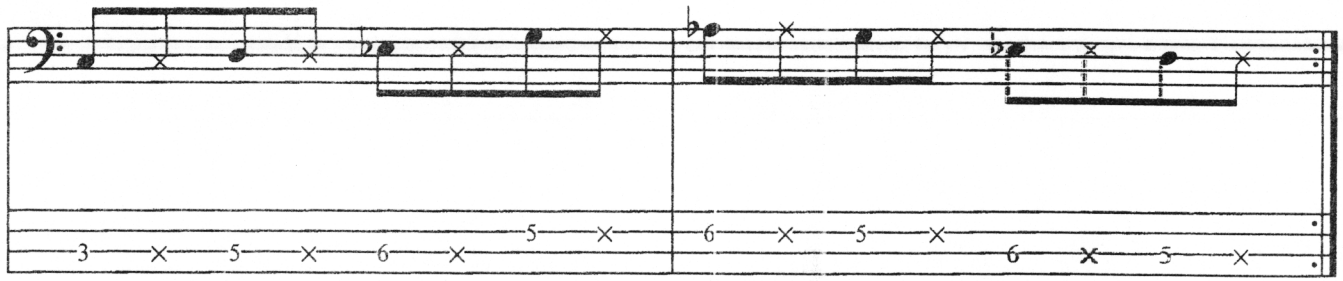
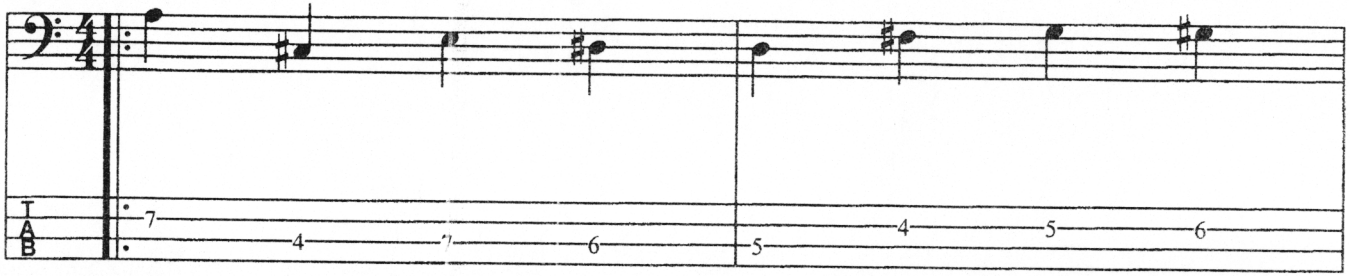
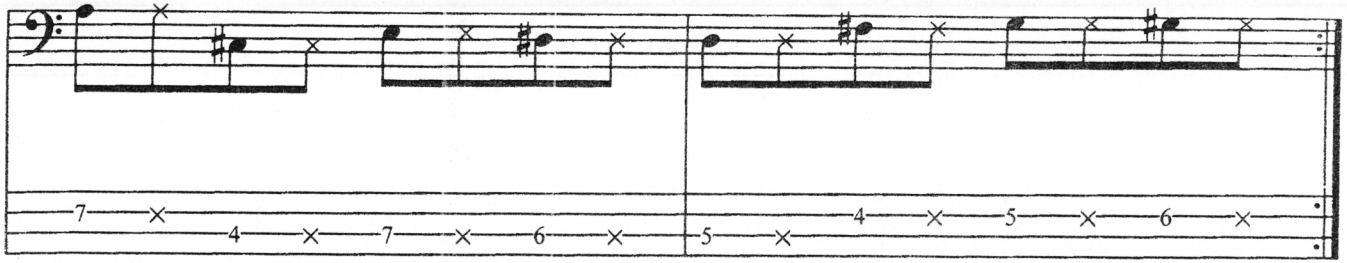
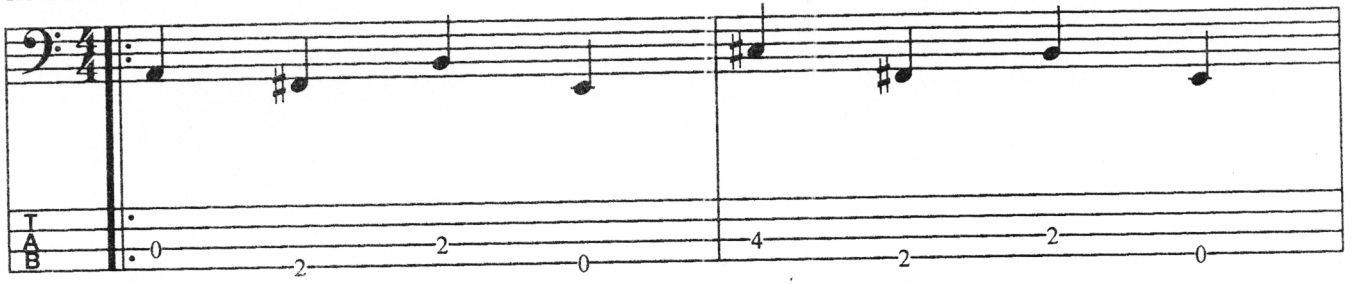
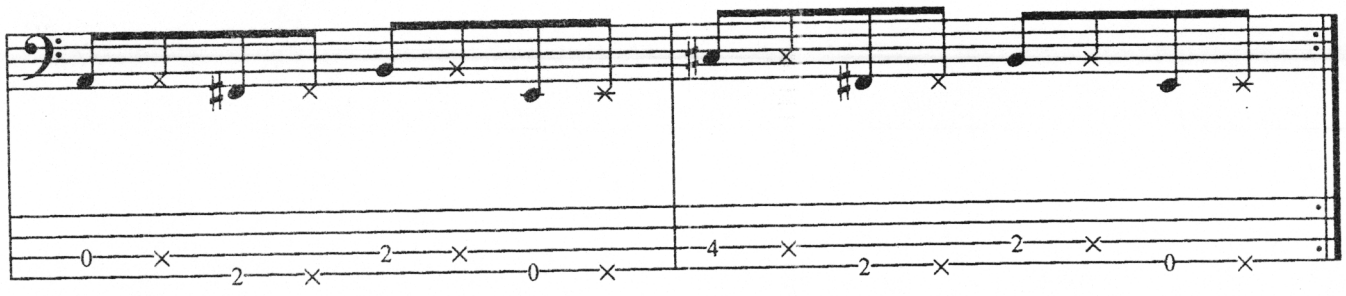




EXAMPLE 99:





EXAMPLE 100: